

**The Relationship of Morality and Religion:
An Investigation of the Issue in Modern Anglophone
Philosophy**

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Declaration

I hereby declare that both this thesis and the research upon which it is based are entirely my own work.

Heather Widdows

Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore the relationship between religion and morality. Traditionally in the West the reality of moral values has been upheld by religion and moral codes legitimised by the belief that they are commanded by God. However, in the present secularised and multi-cultural context, such suppositions are no longer assumed to be true. As a result the nature and status of moral value have been brought into question.

In the contemporary situation there are many different views about the nature of moral values, and about how, or even if, moral values relate to religion. This thesis is written in response to this uncertainty. The aim is to explore and elucidate the nature of moral value and to unravel its connection to religion. The hope is that this thesis will provide some answers concerning the nature of moral values and go some way to prescribing how the relationship between morality and religion should be conceived. This will be done over the course of six chapters.

The first chapter examines the contemporary philosophical debate between realists and anti-realists. Realists assert that moral values are real and certain and can be discovered, while anti-realists contend that values are invented, either individually or collectively. In this chapter the key arguments and points of conflict are discussed and conclusions about the state of the present philosophical debate drawn. This chapter sets the framework and provides the terminology and constructs of the rest of the thesis.

Chapter Two moves to the relationship between morality and religion. This chapter outlines and analyses received views of the connection between religion and moral value. In the course of this chapter divine command theories and other views which assert that moral value is dependent upon religion are assessed. As are opposing claims that moral values are independent of religion. In addition, this chapter introduces and evaluates other ways in which moral value and religion relate.

The third chapter concentrates on the aesthetic realm and its connection to both moral value and to religion. Art is introduced because various theorists have asserted that art, not religion, provides the authority and transcendence of moral value. This claim is explored and conclusions are drawn. In addition, the nature of aesthetic values, and the implications for moral values are investigated, as is the relationship between art and religion.

Chapter Four brings together the three key areas of art, religion and morality by introducing the philosophy of Iris Murdoch. Murdoch presents a moral realism and a picture of moral life which follows from the conclusions which are drawn in the first three chapters. This chapter scrutinises Murdoch's moral realism, a realism which is centred around the moral value of the good. Her work is assessed and the key features elucidated, and complexities analysed.

Murdoch's realism is influenced and to a large extent is derived from the work of Plato. Thus, the fifth chapter focuses upon Plato's conception of moral value. The hope is that an examination of Plato's philosophy will provide further information to enable Murdoch's realism to be adequately assessed.

The final chapter evaluates Murdoch's Platonic realism, and draws conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses of her position. In this chapter what has been learnt about the relationship between morality and religion is discussed. Prescriptions for how best to conceive of this relationship and suggestions about what a moral theory should include are made.

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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the relationship between morality and religion. How one conceives of both moral values and religion are defining factors in how one orders and evaluates the world. Therefore, the status of moral values and their relationship to religion is crucial because it affects the whole spectrum of human life; from the way in which individuals conceive of the world and conduct their relationships, to the way in which communities and nations regulate their populace and interact with other communities.

The current prevailing ideology in the West¹ is that value is relative, in that no one opinion can be deemed superior to another. Thus, tolerance is often held to be the primary moral quality. Alongside relativism runs the simultaneous assumption that there are self-evident moral truths which support fundamental human rights². These two ideologies are contradictory as the presumption of 'rights' necessitates that morality is not relative but absolute, since some actions are deemed to be acceptable and right, and others unacceptable and wrong. Obviously these two philosophies conflict, resulting in confusion with regard to the nature of moral values. In response to the 'moral crisis', questions concerning the nature of moral values and their import for our lives have come to the fore of academic debate in many areas. However, for the most part moral value has been considered in isolation in separate disciplines and too little notice has been taken of discourse in other spheres³. As a result, moral theories have often failed to offer a full account of moral value and have only been able to present a limited picture. By way of a small antidote to this trend, this thesis will focus upon the relationship between moral value and religion, a task which necessitates the investigation of both philosophical and theological approaches. The intention is that this thesis, by exploring the relationship of morality and religion, will add to the current debate in

¹ The remit of this thesis is limited to the Western world, both philosophically and theologically, and therefore unless explicitly stated 'religion' will refer to Christianity.

² Manifest for example, in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1948, and asserts that there are "inalienable rights of all members of the human family".

³ Although this issue is important in many disciplines this thesis will concentrate on theology and philosophy.

both theology and philosophy, and will make suggestions about some of the components which a moral theory must include. This will be done over the course of six chapters⁴.

In Chapter One the focus is on the current debate in Anglophone moral philosophy between realists and anti-realists. This chapter discusses and takes account of the features and terminology of this debate. Chapter Two outlines and analyses received accounts of the possible relationships between morality and religion. Chapter Three follows on from the suggestion made in Chapter Two that moral values are religious in quality and moves the debate into the aesthetic sphere. It addresses the claims that the transcendence found in morality derives from art not religion. Chapter Four introduces the philosophy of Iris Murdoch and her unique conception of moral values and the moral life, in which both art and religion have a role. Chapter Five discusses the Platonic forms which inspire Murdoch's conception of value, and elucidates the religious character of her work. Chapter Six assesses and analyses Murdoch's Platonism and draws conclusions about the relationship between morality and religion. Finally, the conclusion summarises what has been learnt about the connection between morality and religion and the nature of moral value.

⁴ The constraints of space have placed certain limitations upon this thesis. The vastness of the topic requires that much information which is relevant to the issues involved has not been included. Authors used in the work, especially those found in the first three chapters, have been chosen because their work is representative of the various positions in the field. However, there are many others who have not been included and some who are mentioned could have been used more; in order to cover a subject area of this magnitude in a doctoral thesis this was unavoidable. Having said this, the hope is that through the authors used the majority of positions which are predominant in the fields will have been adequately covered.

Chapter One: The Contemporary Philosophical Scene

1.1. Introduction

This study begins by exploring recent developments in moral philosophy. This chapter sets the thesis in its proper context and introduces the terminology which serves to frame the debate. In the contemporary scene the debate concerning the nature of moral values occurs in the discussion between realists and anti-realists.

1.2. The State of the Debate

1.2.1. Realism

The realist position is based on the conviction that moral values are discovered, not constructed. The realist asserts that moral values are ‘real’, in that, in some sense, moral properties ‘exist’ in the world ‘out there’ and are independent of human wishes and desires. Values are deemed to be objective, and moral properties and facts thought to be components upon which human evaluations and judgements are based, just as natural properties and facts are. Equally, moral language is held to refer to ‘real’ properties in the world. Succinctly put, moral realism “is simply the metaphysical (or ontological view) that there exist moral facts” [Smith, 1991, p.402] and that knowledge of these facts is essential for human functioning. Furthermore, moral realists are, in the terminology of this debate, ‘cognitivists’ in that they maintain that moral judgements express beliefs about moral facts; facts which can be discovered.

The realist thesis has been the standard interpretation of moral value throughout the course of Western philosophy – although not the only one⁵ – and has remained so partly because of Christianity⁶. The realist position began to be questioned during the Enlightenment, and was

⁵ For example, the Sophists, who, if one was to impose modern terminology upon them, would be deemed to be anti-realist. The Sophists will be discussed in Chapter Five in relation to Plato’s philosophy.

⁶ See Chapter Two on Divine Command Theory.

further eroded as secularisation took hold. However, it retained its place as the common standpoint, both inside and outside philosophy, until this century. Moral realism is now the minority position, at least within the circles of the philosophically articulate, and it is only in recent years that the realists have mounted any serious opposition to the accepted dominance of anti-realism. At the present time, the renewed interest in this topic has led to a revival of the debate and a reworking of the realist position. Today's philosophical realists claim that moral values are 'real' simply because they are part of the human condition. Accordingly, they do not look to other beliefs, such as religion, to maintain their status.

1.2.2. Anti-Realism

The anti-realist thesis is based on the underlying assumption that moral values are invented, or constructed, that in some way they are dependent upon human wishes. Anti-realist theories can be divided into two principal types: those which adopt a non-cognitivist position, and those which accept a cognitive element in moral reasoning. However, it is worth noting that the term non-cognitivist has often been used to refer to all those who are not realists. This tendency has led to confusion as it is often unclear whether the term 'non-cognitivist' is being used to denote a position for which evaluative responses are deemed to lack cognitive content or as a generic term for all anti-realists. This confusion diverts attention from more fundamental differences about the status of moral values, and therefore, in this study, the term 'anti-realist' will be used as the generic term and 'non-cognitivist' only when the theory in question is literally non-cognitive.

All anti-realists deny that moral values are objective and maintain that moral facts either do not exist (according to the non-cognitivists) or are an invention or projection (according to cognitive anti-realists). In other words, moral values are borne out of human fantasies and wishes, and moral truth-claims are either nonsense – if one embraces a non-cognitive position – or – if one takes a cognitive anti-realist stance – meaningful, though false.

1.2.3. Non-Cognitivism

Non-cognitivism – which offered the first opposition to realism – arose from two philosophical strands: from the Humean conviction that morality was primarily connected to feelings and sentiments rather than to reason, and from the positivist divide of fact and value.

The legacy of David Hume's philosophy is found in the non-cognitive assertion that sentiment, not reason, is the primary factor in the process of moral judgement and decision-making. From Hume's recognition of the importance of feeling in moral assessment, a section of philosophers gradually came to consider sentiment⁷ as the only component in the moral arena. To this emphasis upon the place of sentiment, non-cognitivism added the positivist assertion that facts must be empirically verifiable. Moral value, described in the way made popular by Moore⁸, did not fit these strict criteria and was therefore considered distinct from matters of fact. Hence, moral judgements were deemed to be of a different order from those made about facts.

Thus, the positivist thesis that values are not factual statements, combined with the post-Humean view of the importance of feeling in moral discourse, led to moral value being regarded not as a matter of fact, but as an expression of emotion. A moral statement was thought to be nothing more than an assertion of approval or disapproval.

This non-cognitive assessment of moral value is clearly revealed in the moral philosophy of A. J. Ayer. For Ayer, statements of value are significant only to the extent that "they are ordinary 'scientific' statements; and that in so far as they are not scientific, they are not in the literal sense significant, but are simply expressions of emotion which can be neither true nor false" [Ayer, 1988, p.27]. Ayer maintains that values are unverifiable because there is

⁷ Such as emotivists and intuitionists.

⁸ The distinction which G. E. Moore made between moral properties and natural properties had a profound effect on moral theory. For Moore, good is a simple, indefinable and non-natural property, which is most certainly real but wholly distinct from other properties of everyday experience. For Moore, any move to equate good with a natural property commits one to the "naturalistic fallacy" (see *Principia Ethica*). For Moore values are knowable by moral intuition; hence 'intuitionism'. However, when faced with the positivist criterion, value could not survive.

“no relevant empirical test” [Ayer, 1988, p.30] by which to ascertain their existence or presence in a particular situation. Therefore, he advocates that moral philosophies should “begin by admitting that the fundamental ethical concepts are unanalysable” [Ayer, 1988, p.30] and are thus “pseudo-concepts” [Ayer, 1988, p.30]. Consequently, the addition of a moral term to any statement provides no factual content, but simply reveals the speaker’s approval or disapproval. By way of example, Ayer comments that the statement ‘stealing money is wrong’ has no truth value because no genuine proposition is being stated. Accordingly, in making a moral statement one is, “not making any factual statement, not even a statement about...(one’s)...own state of mind...(one is)...merely expressing certain moral sentiments” [Ayer, 1988, p.31]. Moral statements, therefore, have “no objective validity whatsoever” [Ayer, 1988, p.32] and the only function of moral statements is to express and arouse emotion.

The philosophy of Ayer is a good example of a truly non-cognitivist theory, in which moral values and judgements lack all cognitive content and are reduced simply to expressions of feeling. It is the place of feeling as the determining factor in moral judgement which led to the naming of such forms of non-cognitivism as emotivism. In its purest form, such as Ayer’s, moral judgements are no more than statements of approval and disapproval, and consequently such theories have been termed “Boo-Hurrah” [McNaughton, 1988, p.17] theories.

1.3. The Argument from Experience

The main criticism which the realist has levelled at this type of anti-realist theory is that it cannot offer a non-reductionist account for certain aspects of moral experience. The realist argues that from moral experience it is possible to know that morality is not simply a matter of feeling approval or disapproval, but, that in fact moral values and judgements are

⁹ The term ‘Boo-Hurrah’ has been coined for obvious reasons. When one states that a certain action is morally right, one is merely showing one’s approval, i.e. shouting ‘Hurrah!’ for that action, and conversely when one deems an action wrong, one is simply saying ‘Boo!’, i.e. expressing one’s disapproval.

grounded in reality. The realist is able to account for moral phenomena – such as moral authority¹⁰ – by the simple assertion that moral values are independent of human wishes and thereby make demands upon the agent¹¹. By contrast, the non-cognitivist finds it difficult to explain such experiences, for if moral values are simply statements of approval they do not impose demands. In addition, the non-cognitivist has difficulty not only accounting for moral authority, but also in explaining other aspects of moral experience. In particular, the non-cognitivist finds moral conflict and conversion problematic because moral judgements are concerned not with issues of right and wrong, but merely with attitudes. Therefore, there is no criterion to distinguish between different viewpoints; one cannot be wrong because there are no facts at issue.

Conversely, disagreement and changing beliefs are easily explained using the opposing realist schema. For the realist moral facts exist, therefore it is possible to argue about one's conception of the facts, to find that one is mistaken and to alter one's moral beliefs. In such ways realists argue that moral experience supports their readings of moral value, for we do "seek evidence for our opinions; we act as if there were something to discover, as if we could be mistaken, as if there is a fact of the matter; and we even talk of moral claims being true or false, and of people knowing the better (even while doing the worse)" [Sayre-McCord, 1988, p.9]. Furthermore, from the phenomenology of moral experience the realist maintains that "moral claims are...indistinguishable in logical form and within inferential contexts from claims that are recognised as cognitive" [Sayre-McCord, 1988, p.9]. Moral experience, then, supports the realist cause and thereby presents a challenge to non-cognitivism. If non-cognitivism claims to be an accurate representation of moral values, then the non-cognitivists must explain why their hypotheses do not appear to fit with moral phenomenology.

¹⁰ Moral 'authority' is a collective term to denote all experiences of value when one feels compelled to act in a moral way. For example, feelings of moral obligation, moral requirements and moral demand; all feelings that imply that moral values derive not from the self or from choice but from an external source. In the past, authority has been attributed to God, however this is not the only explanation. Moral authority as derived from an external source is rooted in our moral language and experience.

¹¹ By suggesting that moral values 'make demands', the suggestion is not necessarily that the demand comes from outside the individual; the feeling of demand could just as easily be explained internally, by conscience, or some such hypothesis.

1.3.1. Non-Cognitivist Approaches

Non-cognitivists use various methods to account for the incompatibility of their theories with moral experience. For example, with regard to moral disagreement, Ayer suggests that “if we consider the matter...the dispute is not really about a question of value, but about a question of fact” [Ayer, 1988, p.33]. Hence, in what is apparently a moral disagreement, one is really attempting to change one’s opponent’s attitude to the non-moral facts. If this course of action fails, then the debate is over; there is no kind of recourse to moral facts as such, and therefore, by extension there are no moral disagreements as such.

However, although Ayer has offered a possible account of moral conflict, he has not explained other moral experiences. Moreover, his philosophy ignores common experiences like the fact that we “can sometimes be *wrong* in our moral evaluations” [Rachels, 1991, p.435]. For Ayer, one can never be wrong in one’s moral evaluations because they are only attitudes, which cannot be deemed to be right or wrong. However, other theorists have recognised that fallibility and conversion are central parts of moral experience, and therefore have made attempts to accommodate them. For example, Charles L. Stevenson¹² presents a more complex form of emotivism. In his theory, moral language – although still held to be non-fact-stating and emotional – is to be regarded as expressing far more than simple approval or disapproval. Importantly, moral language is thought to prescribe action and to influence behaviour. Consequently, one does not just disagree in, but rather about, attitude, and thus real disagreement is possible. For Stevenson, one has an attitude not just with regard to a moral action, but also with regard to the attitude of approval or disapproval which one holds. Hence, one does not just disagree about whether one should approve or disapprove of a certain action, but one has a further attitude with regard to what such a stance entails. In this manner Stevenson considers that he has accounted for at least one aspect of moral phenomenology.

¹² His philosophy is outlined in *Facts and Values*.

However, such means of accounting for moral experience are not adequate. Even if one grants that moral disagreement has been satisfactorily explained (and many would not), other elements of moral experience remain elusive, for example, moral authority. Furthermore, Stevenson's account of disagreement about attitudes does not explain how moral reasoning can take place. It is not clear what grounds can be given for why one adopts a certain attitude. If there are no additional grounds (for example moral grounds), but only non-moral facts and random attitudes, then one has simply removed the disagreement by one step. The crux of the disagreement is still centred on attitudes; there are no reasons by which one can change a person's opinion, or which one can use to justify one's own opinion. Thus, even though moral language is held to be more diverse, moral disagreement remains a question of attitude, and for this reason, no matter how complex moral language is held to be, a non-cognitivist cannot satisfactorily explain moral disagreement and experience.

1.3.2. Other Anti-Realist Approaches

The inability of non-cognitivist positions to incorporate moral phenomenology into their schemas has led some anti-realist theorists to search for other ways of conceiving of value as invented, without the attendant problems of equating moral judgement directly with feeling. Such anti-realists adopt a cognitive position in that they "recognise the existence of moral facts and the truth of moral propositions but...claim that these moral facts are constituted by *some* function of our moral beliefs" [Brink, 1989a, p.18]. Thus, they accept the validity of moral claims and the phenomenology of moral experience, but deny that these claims identify real properties which are independent of human wishes. The theories which such anti-realists prescribe are termed 'error theories' because they maintain that moral claims, though capable of being true, are in fact false¹³.

Anti-realist theories of this order are denoted by many different terms, including, somewhat confusingly, non-cognitivism. Two main types of theory which come under this heading are

¹³ This kind of anti-realist theory is more appropriately attributed to Hume than a non-cognitivist theory is. Hume, though elevating emotion as a primary factor in ethics, did not see moral judgement as simply an emotional response, but rather as part of the response. For Hume, moral value is a human construction and the objectivity attributed to moral value is false.

‘subjectivism’ and ‘projectivism’. For subjectivists, moral facts exist but they are not objective. Rather, the “truth of moral claims depends on the subjective states of individuals” [Sayre-McCord, 1988, p.16]. The claim ‘x is good’ in subjectivist terms means that ‘x is good as I understand it’. This claim can be cognitively judged to be true or false depending upon the desires, preferences and goals of the person stating the proposition. In this presentation, then, truth claims are cognitive in that they can be judged true or false, but they are not objective or universal and do not refer to anything except the psychological state of the observer. Hence, moral values are invented in that they derive from human preference.

1.3.2.1. Projectivism

The projectivist thesis is that moral values are projected attitudes and beliefs. Values are not merely emotional responses, and although they may have their initial grounding in individual preferences they are collective projections. An example of an anti-realist who adopts a projectivist stance is J. L. Mackie. Mackie clearly is not a non-cognitivist¹⁴ because his theory admits that moral statements and judgements contain cognitive truth claims; “for there are certain kinds of value statements which undoubtedly can be true or false” [Mackie, 1989, p.268]. The terms that Mackie uses to describe his own position are ‘subjectivism’ and ‘scepticism’, classifications which he defines in order to avoid confusion. He maintains that he is a moral subjectivist in that he contends that “there are no objective values” [Mackie, 1977, p.15], a statement which he insists does not make him a ‘subjectivist’ (as defined above), for “the denial that there are objective values does not commit one to any particular view about what moral statements mean, and certainly not to the view that they are equivalent to subjective reports” [Mackie, 1977, p.18]. Rather, the term is intended simply to denote that moral values, if not objective, must be “in some very broad sense subjective” [Mackie, 1977, p.18]. By scepticism, Mackie means to imply a ‘second-order’ presumption

¹⁴ Despite being referred to as a non-cognitivist by certain commentators, for example, Brink. This confusing denotation is no doubt due to the common convention of referring to all non-realists as non-cognitivists, a convention which presumably stems from the fact that in the first instance anti-realists were non-cognitivists. This terminology has remained in use despite the advent of theories for which the term is not appropriate.

that “there do not exist entities or relations of a certain kind, objective values or requirements, which many people have believed to exist” [Mackie, 1977, p.17]¹⁵.

The distinction that Mackie draws between first- and second-order views is an essential premise for his projectivist thesis. Second-order views are the theories one adopts about the nature of morality and first-order views are the practical convictions one holds which determine what constitutes moral action. Thus, Mackie’s scepticism is a theoretical stance, concerned with “the status of moral values and the nature of moral valuing, about where and how they fit into the world” [Mackie, 1977, p.16], and should not be confused with scepticism about the first-order task of practical moral judgement. Mackie asserts that “first and second order views are not merely distinct but completely independent” [Mackie, 1977, p.16], therefore it is possible to hold strong conventional first-order moral commitments, while maintaining the second-order view that moral values are merely expressions of attitudes. He accepts that in the first-order world of practical moral judgement there are “kinds of behaviour to which moral values and disvalues are ascribed...(which)...are indeed part of the furniture of the world” [Mackie, 1977, p.16], but the nature of these values can be explained by different second-order theories. Hence, the realist and the projectivist could hold the same first-order position, with the same certainty, while explaining the nature of values using opposing second-order theories.

Mackie accepts that ordinary experience supports a realist conception of moral values and, in addition, that moral language is “certainly not inert, but something that involves a call for action or for the refraining from action, and one that is absolute” [Mackie, 1977, p.33]. Hence, moral experience leads one to conceive of moral values as objective and prescriptive¹⁶. However, though the realist case is endorsed by ordinary language and experience, he judges it to be erroneous. Mackie’s thesis is that “the claim to objectivity,

¹⁵ Mackie’s scepticism is not to be confused with two first-order positions which are also called moral scepticism: that of the person who rejects all morality and takes no notice of it, and that of the person who condemns conventional morality and replaces it with his own moral framework.

¹⁶ ‘Objective prescriptivity’ is used by Mackie to signify what would otherwise be termed moral authority. In other words, he is indicating that values seem to be objective in origin and make demands upon the agent, and hence prescribe action.

however ingrained in our language and thought, is not self-validating" [Mackie, 1989, p.271].

Such reasoning leads Mackie to put forward a thesis which accounts for the objectivity which experience implies without assuming that moral values are real. His solution is that moral values are projections of subjective, and importantly communal, values which are then regarded as objective. Therefore, he hypothesises that "we can understand the supposed objectification of moral qualities as arising from what we can call the projection or objectivity of moral attitudes" [Mackie, 1977, p.42]. According to this reasoning, moral values arise not from feelings and attitudes but are "at least partly social in origin: socially established – and socially necessary" [Mackie, 1977, pp.42-43]. The social element is essential, for part of the purpose of morality is to regulate interpersonal relations. Moral values function so as to "control some of the ways in which people behave towards one another" [Mackie, 1977, p.43] and to ensure certain standards of behaviour, and thereby sustain behaviour patterns and social structures. In this manner, then, "our central and basic moral judgements represent social demands" [Mackie, 1977, p.44], determined not by the individual but to which the individual must conform. This social factor indicates that "moral values have indeed an external source, though not the one assigned to them by the belief in their absolute authority" [Mackie, 1977, p.43]. Thus, for Mackie, values are constructs of society and therefore are incumbent upon the individual, yet they are not 'real' in the sense that they are not independent of human needs, for "morality is not to be discovered but to be made" [Mackie, 1977, p.106].

Mackie insists that a projectivist conception of moral value is able to explain much of the phenomenology of moral experience, including certain elements of moral authority. Because morality is a projection of real social needs, it follows that obligations and demands are real features of experience (although their source is not an external objective one, but a social one). Mackie contends that these moral obligations are maintained by social 'institutions', and that positing such institutions elucidates experiences like that of moral demand.

An 'institution' Mackie defines as "constituted by many people behaving in fairly regular ways, with relations between them which transmit and encourage and perhaps enforce these ways of behaving" [Mackie, 1977, p.80]. Institutions have rules to which an agent must conform in order to avoid condemnation. The rules of an institution can be explicit and formal, such as in the game of chess, or they can be informal, such as in the institution of promising. Mackie uses the example of promising to illustrate how moral obligation can be explained using a projectivist model of moral value. He argues that promising arises and is maintained because it regulates behaviour and enhances the smooth running of society, and as such "may well be a universal human practice, to be found in all societies; it is certainly one that could grow very naturally out of the ordinary conditions of human life" [Mackie, 1977, p.81]. The moral obligation to keep a promise arises "not merely by a speaker's statement of intention in conjunction with the desire of the person to whom the promise is made that it should be fulfilled, or even by these together with the hearer's reliance on the statement and the speaker's expectation that the hearer will, and intention that he should, so rely" [Mackie, 1977, p.81]. The creation of the institution of promising does not depend on individuals, but on society-wide assumptions: "expectations, approvals, disapprovals, and demands" [Mackie, 1977, p.81]. Promising can only occur in the context of a wider society which supports and upholds institutions, and it is from these that moral obligations arise. Institutions place the agent under a moral obligation to act in a certain way and as a result the agent feels morally compelled to act accordingly, and is censored if he does not so act. It is this feeling, Mackie argues, that has led to the erroneous supposition that moral values are objective, and he states that concepts such as "moral obligation, embody very natural errors; but errors none the less" [Mackie, 1977, p.82]. Obligation, therefore, is a real demand, but the true source of obligation is society, not objective values. By such means Mackie contends that an anti-realist – while maintaining that values are invented and therefore not real – can account for the experience of moral authority.

1.3.2.2. Quasi-Realism

Mackie is not the only anti-realist who attempts to explain the phenomenology of moral value. A further attempt has been made by Simon Blackburn, who endorses 'quasi-realism'. Quasi-realism is also a projectivist account of moral value. However, it differs from Mackie's in that it is not an 'error theory'. Instead of regarding the claim to objectivity as erroneous, Blackburn maintains that "the quasi-realist will see it instead as a proper, necessary expression of an attitude to our own attitudes" [Blackburn, 1985, p.5]. He interprets the objectivist tendency in moral language not as the expression of a realist theoretical conviction about the status of moral value, but rather as a means to convey the significance of moral issues. Blackburn argues that belief in objective values should not be rejected, but cultivated "to the right degree in the right places, to avoid the (moral) defect of indifference to things that merit passion" [Blackburn, 1985, p.6]. Cultivating an attitude which regards moral values as objective, he delineates as a "central quasi-realist tactic: what seems like a thought which embodies a particular second-order metaphysic of morals is seen instead as a kind of thought which expresses a first-order attitude or need" [Blackburn, 1985, p.6]. Thus, he regards the claim to objectivity – which is embodied in moral language and in the experience of moral value – not as a statement about the ontological nature of moral value, but rather as signifying the importance of moral issues and moral judgements.

To illustrate his position, Blackburn uses the example of bear-baiting. The moral judgement that 'bear-baiting is wrong', and wrong in all circumstances – "even if we had approved of it or enjoyed it or desired to do it" [Blackburn, 1985, p.6] – appears to be an unequivocal realist claim. Blackburn argues that if one interprets this in a quasi-realist manner, then the proposition is not the second-order realist commitment that it appears to be, but rather, it is a "perfectly sensible first-order commitment to the effect that it is not our own enjoyments or approvals which you should look to in discovering whether bear-baiting is wrong (it is at least mainly the effect on the bear)" [Blackburn, 1985, p.6]. Therefore, according to Blackburn, the statement 'bear-baiting is wrong', conveys information not about the presence of the moral property of 'wrongness', but about a practical commitment to a

particular position. By this means, Blackburn purports to account for the inherent realist element of moral language, and he asserts that “quasi-realism...supports and indeed explains...much of our ordinary thought” [Blackburn, 1985, p.6]. Thus, he contends that a quasi-realist projectivist theory enables one to:

assert those tantalising expressions of apparent mind-independence: it is not my sentiments that make bear-baiting wrong; it is not because we disapprove of it that mindless violence is abominable; it is preferable that the world should be a beautiful place even after all consciousness of it ceases. [Blackburn, 1985, p.10]

Blackburn maintains that the projectivist, protected by the doctrine of quasi-realism, can adequately account for moral experience and language. Furthermore, he argues that the quasi-realist can even assert that “there are real obligations and values and that many of them are independent of us” [Blackburn, 1985, p.11]. For one cannot simply choose which values to uphold, but must conform to the values endorsed by the wider society. Therefore, in making what are apparently realist statements, the quasi-realist “affirms *all that could ever properly be meant* by saying there are real obligations” [Blackburn, 1985, p.11]. By such means a quasi-realist, no less so than a realist, can profess that certain actions should be done and others should not. The only difference between the realist and the quasi-realist is that the quasi-realist disagrees with the second-order explanation, in that he does not subscribe to the view that “when we moralise we respond to, and describe, an independent aspect of reality” [Blackburn, 1985, p.11]. Consequently, the two views are undifferentiated in practice, distinguished only by the theoretical stance their respective holders adopt to moral value. This contention Blackburn supports with a mathematical example. He points out that one does not need to be a mathematical realist (i.e. have the second-order belief that numbers correspond to an independent reality) in order to accept that “ $7 + 5$ is ‘really’ 12” [Blackburn, 1985, p.11]. Correspondingly, in morality one does not need to believe that there is a moral property of ‘wrongness’ that exists independently of one’s perception of it in order to recognise that bear-baiting is wrong.

Blackburn's thesis, then, is that quasi-realism proffers a projectivist conception of morality which is capable of elucidating "our ordinary ways of thought and our ordinary commitments and passions" [Blackburn, 1985, p.11]. Thus, he argues that quasi-realism succeeds in "making moralising an intelligible human activity with its own explanation and its own propriety" [Blackburn, 1985, p.17]. By such means he, like Mackie, contends that anti-realism can offer an adequate account of the phenomenology of moral experience, and that such experience should not be thought of as solely supporting a realist conception of moral value.

1.3.3. The Independence of First- and Second-Order Views

1.3.3.1. An Anti-Realist Premise

Projectivists, such as Mackie and Blackburn, assert that first and second-order views of morality are independent. Indeed, this premise is central to their claim that the anti-realist can make and explain moral truth-claims. However, such an assumption is not uncontroversial as it is possible to argue that second-order views have a profound impact on first-order moral convictions and actions.

For example, it could be argued that Mackie's own second-order view – that morality is invented – has a profound impact upon his first-order moral commitment. It is Mackie's second-order conviction that moral values are social constructs which enables him to suggest that the task of first-order morality is to "decide what moral views to adopt...what moral stands to take...what to support, and what to condemn" [Mackie, 1977, p.106]. Mackie contends that first-order morality begins with the limitation of individual wishes so that a society can be formed¹⁷. After this first stage Mackie advises that the rest of morality should be invented with reference to "general human well-being or the flourishing of human life as the foundation of morality" [Mackie, 1977, p.193]. His own suggestion is that morality should promote a humane disposition which "manifests itself in hostility to and disgust at

¹⁷ In support of this 'social contract' account of the nature of moral values, Mackie cites Hobbes, Hume and Warnock.

cruelty and in sympathy with pain and suffering” [Mackie, 1977, p.194]. These suggestions about how moral values should be (re)invented are entirely dependent upon his second-order views. If one held realist views, the first-order project which Mackie advises would be impossible for, from a realist standpoint, moral positions are not formed according to human decisions but exist independently of human wishes. Conversely, if one had a non-cognitivist second-order view, then ‘making’ morality would be unimportant as moral views are simply attitudes. Therefore, the insistence of the independence of first- and second-order views is by no means established, and without it the projectivist thesis is threatened. For, if the two views are not independent then anti-realism inevitably endorses a position in which the significance of moral commitment and action are lessened.

1.3.3.2. *Defence of the Premise*

Blackburn maintains that the above conclusion is false and that first- and second-order views are indeed separate. He argues that failure to recognise the independence of first and second-order convictions leads many to reject the projectivist schema. He suggests that reluctance to adopt a projectivist account stems from the fear that a change in second-order views will change people’s first-order moral convictions. The assumption is that a shift to a projectivist reading threatens the status of moral values, which will then cease to possess “quite the power or force, the title to respect, which we were brought up to believe” [Blackburn, 1985, p.6]. Thus, there is a perceived “tension between the subjective source which projectivism gives to morality, and the objective ‘feel’ that a properly working morality has” [Blackburn, 1985, p.6]. However, such tension only arises if second-order views are thought to influence first-order morality. This, he contends, is a misconception and he denies that shifting to a subjectivist account results in any loss of status or power for morality. Consequently, he regards such fears as unfounded, contending that “it is a complete mistake to think that the notion of moral truth, and the associated notions of moral attributes and propositions disappear when the realistic theory is refuted” [Blackburn, 1971, p.124]. Blackburn attempts to illustrate that there is no change in first-order views when a change in second-order views occurs, using the example of Fred and Mabel. In his example Fred and Mabel want to marry.

However, because of his upbringing, Fred believes that this would be morally wrong, presumably because it would be against the moral values with which Fred was brought up¹⁸. Blackburn argues that Fred could not simply decide to marry Mabel by replacing his objective conception of moral value with a projectivist outlook, because a change in Fred's theoretical position would not necessarily alter his moral practice. The actions and properties which had value when the source of morality was deemed to be objective would continue to have worth for Fred in the practical business of choosing how to live within the context of his own society. Thus, Blackburn surmises that the second-order belief about the status of moral value does not automatically affect first-order moral practice, for "rationality in itself does not force one sensibility or another on us *just* because we have some belief about the origin of that sensibility" [Blackburn, 1985, p.9].

This said, although there is no inevitable repercussion when one changes one's second-order view, Blackburn does accept that there may be some change in moral practice. Thus, he allows that "morality might contain values whose effect, coupled with a projective explanation, is to diminish a subject's respect for some obligations" [Blackburn, 1985, p.9]. For example, if one rejects an objectivist conception of morality in favour of a projectivist view, then one may no longer wish to argue for one's moral beliefs because one now believes that "moral commitments lack real, objective truth values, certified by an independent reality" [Blackburn, 1985, pp.9-10]. In the case of Fred, for example¹⁹, one could hypothesise that if he rejected the objectivist position of his upbringing and embraced a projectivist outlook, he might reassess the values he grew up to believe in and his reasons for not marrying Mabel. It is possible that he would conclude that his former reasons were unfounded, because there are no 'real' moral properties. Consequently, he might infer that he was not bound by the values he had been raised to respect, and therefore he would be free to choose to marry Mabel.

¹⁸ An extrapolation drawn from the fact that Blackburn maintains that moral values are derived from the mores and conventions of the society in which one is brought up, and that these form the parameters within which one must conduct one's life in order to preserve both self-respect and the respect of others in the given community.

¹⁹ Blackburn himself does not extend the example at this point.

This kind of reassessment Blackburn accepts, but he insists that it does not entail any wholesale rejection of morality, but only an alteration of certain unfounded moral beliefs. He argues that a complete rejection of morality will only occur if a person has been instructed to respect false values and brought up to care exclusively for certain things. For example, if an agent has been taught to act morally for no other reason than such an action is required, then it is possible that an agent could renounce all morality. For example²⁰, if Fred had been taught to value the code of his community for no other reason than that it was obligatory, then it is possible that – on changing to a projectivist position – he might not only reject the moral values which he considered groundless (such as reasons for not marrying Mabel), but might come to the conclusion that all moral values are worthless, and renounce morality altogether.

Such a scenario Blackburn considers extreme, and he deems it unlikely that a projectivist theory would lead to a rejection of morality altogether. He insists that the projectivist denial that moral values are not ‘real’ (in that they do not correspond to anything existing in the world) is not equivalent to contending that there are no moral truths. In fact, he goes as far as to declare that “to think there are no moral truths is to think that nothing should be morally endorsed...which...would be wrong to recommend, and silly to practice” [Blackburn, 1971, p.124]. Blackburn argues that morality would only be rejected if one had a ‘defective sensibility’ – because of one’s false moral upbringing – which would mean that one lacked the capacity to make moral judgements using other criteria.

Accordingly, Blackburn holds that fears that projectivism in general, and quasi-realism in particular, inevitably carry “a loss of status to morality...ought to be groundless, and will only appear if a defective sensibility leads them to respect the wrong things” [Blackburn, 1985, p.10]. He maintains that the second-order views which one holds about the status of moral values “in no way impugns our right to hold them, nor the passion with which we should do so” [Blackburn, 1985, p.10]. For Blackburn, then, there is no reason why one should not continue “valuing the good things of life whilst knowing that the valuing is an

²⁰ Again, extending Blackburn’s example.

expression of our own subjective sentiments” [Blackburn, 1985, p.10]. Hence, his conviction is that the origin of moral values should not affect the status of values as carriers of worth and significance. Those who cannot accept that meaning is conferred subjectively, and believe that a lack of objectivity is equivalent to a lack of meaning, are held to possess a defective sensibility.

1.3.4. Summary

Despite Blackburn’s strong defence of the independence of first- and second-order views, and his polemic against any claims that an anti-realist conception reduces the importance of morality and leads to relativism, it is not clear that he has proved his case. Blackburn himself admits that a change in one’s second-order views may lead one to reassess the status of values. Moreover, it is not clear why, having rejected unfounded values, one is left with certain presumably correct values. According to Blackburn, given that values are projected, then surely these values are no more real than the ones which were rejected as unfounded. It seems that, contrary to Blackburn’s claim, a second-order projectivist understanding profoundly affects which first-order values one endorses. Indeed, Blackburn himself goes as far as to suggest that a projectivist second-order theorist is likely to endorse a consequentialist first-order approach. Thus, it seems that Blackburn’s defence is unconvincing and that changing to a projectivist outlook does compromise the ability to make moral truth claims such as ‘bear-baiting is wrong’, as opposed to claim that ‘I/we hold bear baiting to be wrong’.

In addition, Blackburn’s contention that any change in an individual’s moral practice arising from an alteration in second-order views can be directly ascribed to a ‘defective sensibility’, is at best arbitrary. If values are not real but projected, then why should one adopt one view rather than another? Clearly, Blackburn – in a similar vein to Mackie – would answer this question by arguing that one should take a humane stance which upholds a fair society, increases human flourishing, or some such thing. (The only criterion which Blackburn

explicitly suggests²¹ is that the world should continue to be a beautiful place²².) However, despite his own wish to endorse such a morality, because values are projected this can ultimately be no more than a preference. Although Blackburn asserts that some moral attitudes should be upheld, without turning to a realist account it is difficult to understand why this should be the case. Moral values may be projected by society and he may put forward criteria which he believes are the best ones for a society to adopt and live by, but these are not 'right', or even necessarily 'better'. The endorsing of one set of values over another, according to a projectivist reading, can only be legitimised by the fact that most²³ concur and project these values. Blackburn's quasi-realism, while maintaining the significance of morality, does not alter the fact that at their root values are projections, and therefore no one set can be claimed to be intrinsically better. Therefore, if others assert different values or criteria by which moral values should be judged, such as egoism or male supremacy, Blackburn's only recourse is to declare such people 'defective'. However, this approach is only possible when these opinions remain in the minority and are not endorsed by most of society. If Blackburn maintained his view in the face of an egotistical society he would be unable to find reasons to support his own position. In order to support his own standpoint he would have to find a framework which legitimised certain opinions over others by virtue of something other than preference, or mass preference. Any such framework would have to look to criteria other than those which he has outlined and for which the most likely explanation would be realist.

Thus, not only is it the case that first- and second-order moral views appear to be connected and to influence each other, but, moreover, the attempts which anti-realists make to endorse first-order views cannot be fully accounted for given their projectivist claims. Therefore, either projectivists must further account for the criteria by which they endorse certain moral values – which suggests realism – or they must accept that projectivism is the ratification of

²¹ See quote above in Section 1.3.2.2.

²² Though it is not clear how preferences of beauty could be evaluated; some might consider bear-baiting beautiful.

²³ Or the most powerful, richest, cleverest or kindest, depending upon which criteria or criterion one adopts.

a culturally-relative theory in which moral values may alter in ways which they as individuals would not sanction.

1.4. The Status of Moral Values

1.4.1. A Question of Queer Entities

Although Mackie's and Blackburn's division of first- and second-order views is not entirely convincing, they have attempted to account for some aspects of moral experience and thereby threaten the realists' claim that their thesis is supported by moral phenomenology. Not only do they defend anti-realism in this manner, but in addition, they argue that – contrary to common assumptions – realist conceptions of moral value do not accord with moral experience. Their thesis is that realism does not correspond with moral experience in two main ways; first, that it does not take account of moral relativism, and second, that moral values are not self-evident but are 'queer entities'.

The 'argument from relativity', as Mackie terms it, simply cites our experience of "variation[s] in moral codes from one society to another and from one period to another, and also the differences in moral beliefs between different groups and classes within a complex community" [Mackie, 1977, p.36]. These variations, he maintains, are proof of an anti-realist conception of morality, for these "radical differences between first order moral judgements make it difficult to treat those judgements as apprehensions of objective truths" [Mackie, 1977, p.36]. Therefore, the claim is that the relativity of moral beliefs supports a projectivist conception of morality, not a realist one²⁴.

The second and most important argument against the realists' claim that they are supported by experience is the postulation that if moral values were objective then they "would be

²⁴ A standard realist rebuttal is to observe that if moral values were simply a projection, then moral change would not have occurred. Mackie disagrees, stating that change "can usually be understood as the extension, in ways which, though new and unconventional, seemed to them to be required for consistency, of rules to which they already adhered as arising out of an existing way of life" [Mackie, 1977, pp.36-37].

entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe” [Mackie, 1977, p.38]. In addition, in order to perceive these queer entities, there would need to be “some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing” [Mackie, 1977, p.38]. In the process of knowing moral value, no ordinary:

sensory perception or introspection or the framing and confirming of explanatory hypotheses or inference or logical construction or conceptual analysis, or any combination of these, will provide a satisfactory answer: ‘a special sort of intuition’ is a lame answer, but it is the one to which the clear-headed objectivist is compelled to resort. [Mackie, 1989, p.273]

The queerness of moral properties is compounded by the difficulty which the realist finds in accounting for the means by which moral value is connected to natural properties²⁵. Mackie rejects realist theories such as supervenience, because he deems them to be far more complicated than subjectivist or projectivist theories. Therefore, Mackie argues that a realist approach, rather than being supported by moral experience, is actually removed from ordinary experience and ways of knowing. Thus, he asserts that it is “less paradoxical to reject than to retain the common-sense belief in the objectivity of moral values” [Mackie, 1977, p.42].

²⁵ There are two main methods by which realists connect moral properties to natural properties: identification or supervenience. An identification theory quite simply identifies moral properties with natural properties. The claim is that moral properties are properties of the real world, just as natural properties are, and hence commits the naturalistic fallacy. One example of such a theory is found in the work of Boyd, who suggests that all properties, both moral and natural, have a similar structure. Properties are homeostatic clusters which are made up of ‘natural kinds’ and ‘underlying mechanisms’. The kinds which make up a physical property are elements such as hydrogen and oxygen and in moral properties are human goods such as kindness and generosity. In both cases a property is causal when “an adequate number of these properties” [Boyd, 1988, p.196], or kinds, come together along “with some or all of the mechanisms which underlie it” [Boyd, 1988, p.197]. Thus, moral facts are constituted in the same way as natural facts, and because of the nature of homeostatic clusters he accounts for why, even when certain kinds come together, they are not always causal, because the properties are ‘open-textured’ in that there “is some indeterminacy in extension *legitimately* associated with property-cluster...definitions” [Boyd, 1988, p.196]. Therefore, the causal effect of a cluster will vary and the “outcome, if any, will typically be different in different possible worlds” [Boyd, 1988, p.197]. By way of example, Boyd cites biological species which depend upon “*imperfectly* shared and homeostatically related morphological, physiological and behavioural features which characterise its members” [Boyd, 1988, p.198]. Supervenience theories assert a relationship of dependency of moral properties upon natural properties. Accordingly, any change in natural properties results in a change in the moral properties, though a change in moral properties does not necessitate a change in natural properties. These theories are favoured by Sturgeon and Sayre-McCord. Sturgeon strongly disapproves of identification theories, declaring that one can “be a moral realist, and indeed an ethical naturalist, without believing that we are now or ever will be in possession of reductive naturalistic definitions for ethical terms” [Sturgeon, 1989, p.295].

In like manner, Blackburn observes that the task of describing moral properties and the way they connect to natural properties is an “insuperable difficulty for a realistic theory” [Blackburn, 1971, p.105]. Furthermore, he argues that common conceptions of moral value directly contradict realist theories of the nature of moral properties. He alleges that natural facts are not ordinarily believed to produce moral facts, and moral worth is not understood as being “entailed by the possession of any set of naturalistic properties” [Blackburn, 1971, p.107]. Therefore, he suggests that embedded in ordinary understandings of moral value is the presumption of ‘lack of entailment’ (entailment being the view that natural properties entail moral properties), which is incompatible with realist accounts of moral properties²⁶. ‘Lack of entailment’ means that the doctrine of “supervenience becomes, for the realist, an opaque, isolated, logical fact, for which no explanation can be offered” [Blackburn, 1971, p.111]. He argues that if the realist position was really based upon ordinary moral experience, then the realist would share the common conception that natural facts do not carry moral worth. However, the realist, in continuing to hold that moral properties are connected to natural properties, rejects the testimony of ordinary experience. Thus, Blackburn concludes that without the usual recourse to moral experience, realist attempts to account for moral facts are ineffectual and “moral realism then is false” [Blackburn, 1971, p.116].

1.4.2. A Question of Relativity

Realists have addressed the argument from relativity in various ways. Commonly they have responded that either relativity is borne out of a misinterpretation of moral values, or that discovery of moral values is filtered by one’s own situation and culture²⁷. One example of a possible counter-argument comes from Boyd who suggests that relativity is part of the nature of homeostatic clusters²⁸, and so a feature of all properties (moral and natural). He argues that it is “possible to portray occasional indeterminacy in the extension of moral

²⁶ Whether identification or supervenience is adopted.

²⁷ For though values do not change, the interpretation of them is shaped and qualified by the context and by the fact that values cannot be completely known, in that the determination of moral properties is a task in itself; they are not simply given.

²⁸ See footnote 25.

terms as rationally dictated by the nature of the subject matter in a way analogous to the scientific realist's treatment of such indeterminacy in the case of homeostatic cluster terms" [Boyd, 1988, p.201]. Therefore, the fact that different people or communities "apply different definitions in using a term is not, by itself, sufficient to show that they are using the term to refer to different kinds, properties, etc." [Boyd, 1988, p.195]. By virtue of the indeterminacy built into clusters, properties are not always causal, and therefore differences occur. Thus, he maintains that moral facts are establishable, and therefore "moral realism is plausible and defensible" [Boyd, 1988, p.202]. By such means the argument from relativity has been regarded as inconclusive, and realists have concentrated far more on countering the argument from queerness, recognising that this critique is far more threatening to their cause.

1.4.3. Moral Facts and Scientific Facts

The realists' main way of responding to the allegation that moral values are queer entities has been to argue that moral values are akin to other facts and can be known in similar ways. In other words they are neither queer, nor are they known by a special faculty of intuition. The foremost means realists have used to establish their claim is to argue that moral facts are similar to scientific facts.

The crux of the positivist critique is that, unlike scientific facts, moral facts even if they exist, are irrelevant because they are unverifiable and therefore lack causal efficacy. It is this assumption that moral values, or facts, are not observable and thereby ineffective, that realists take issue with. Realists counter that one can never just observe 'a fact', rather, observation can only take place in the context of certain assumptions and theories. Experiments are performed in order to test a particular hypothesis and therefore are organised in anticipation of receiving the expected data. Consequently, the structure of experiments is such that the resulting data are predetermined. Thus, observation is always theory-dependent in that "what you perceive depends to some extent on the theory you hold, consciously or unconsciously" [Harman, 1989, p.290]. Following such reasoning, realists declare that pure verification is not applicable to scientific theories because of the

“extraordinary role which theoretical considerations play in actual (and patently successful) scientific practice” [Boyd, 1988, p.188]²⁹. Observations do not take place in isolation, but are conditioned not only by the parameters of the theory that they are testing, but also by background theories. Hence, even scientific theories cannot be treated in isolation, but only in the context of a matrix of theories, for “scientific principles – principles such as Newton’s law of universal gravitation or Darwin’s theory of evolution – ...are entirely devoid of empirical implications when considered in isolation” [Sturgeon, 1989, p.295]. In science, theories are not judged alone, but rather, the plausibility of new theories is tested by reference to existing ones. Scientific inference, then, cannot be reduced to a set of basic rules or theories, but must be seen as a whole related canon, and it is in light of this that “tacit or intuitive judgements in science are reliable...because they are grounded in a theoretical tradition (itself partly tacit) which is, as a matter of contingent empirical fact, relevantly and approximately true” [Boyd, 1988, p.193]. Thus, observation is possible only within a nexus of assumptions and background theories to the extent that “scientific methodology, dictated by currently accepted theories, is reliable at producing further knowledge precisely *because, and to the extent that, currently accepted theories are relevantly and approximately true*” [Boyd, 1988, p.190]³⁰. Furthermore, scientists do not even rely upon observation upheld by theory, but in fact they posit the existence of many unobservable entities. For example, ‘quarks’, which have as one of their six essential properties ‘strangeness’, along with ‘charge’, ‘parity’, ‘time’, ‘colour’ and ‘charm’³¹. Thus, the theory-dependent nature of scientific methods means that scientists are “capable of providing (partial or approximate) knowledge of unobservable (‘theoretical’) entities, such as atoms or electromagnetic fields, in addition to knowledge about the behaviour of observable phenomena” [Boyd, 1988, p.188]. Therefore, realists point out that scientific facts are often unobservable and theoretical, yet nevertheless they are accepted as true, in the sense of being accurate. If the same criteria are applied to moral values then they too can be established as real.

²⁹ A thesis broadly accepted since the work of Kuhn and Hanson.

³⁰ Moreover, certain scientific theories insist on the indeterminacy of any scientific theory, such as Gödel’s theorem, which asserts that “for any consistent formal M containing a certain part of arithmetic, a sentence in the language of M can be constructed which is neither provable nor refutable in M ” [Honderich, 1995, p.320].

Moral realists contend that the observation of moral facts can be paralleled to observation in science (if one accepts the theory-dependent nature of scientific fact), for one tests one's moral beliefs against observation, just as one tests scientific theory. As in science, a moral observation is deemed to occur when one forms a moral opinion based upon what one has observed, and as in science, these observations either confirm or contradict one's theory. If there is a conflict, then, just as in science, one must either accept the observation and modify one's moral beliefs accordingly, or deny the validity of the observation. Hence, moral realists claim that the function of moral observation is the same as the role of observation in science, since moral judgements and theories are formed in an analogous way to judgements about matters of fact. However, not only must the realist find similarity between the role of observation, but the background theories must be approximately true, and there must be a progression to a more certain knowledge. Boyd argues that indeed morality is analogous in these ways, for, just as scientific inquiry is dependent upon social conditions – economic, political, on the state of technology, and on the theoretical legacy – so too is morality. Moral background theories arise from the world around, and immediate moral theories are dependent upon “‘naturally’ occurring...political and social experiments” [Boyd, 1988, p.205]. Furthermore, Boyd also maintains that like scientific understanding, moral understanding evolves along with other theories, an assertion he illustrates using the example of slavery. He argues that moral knowledge of the injustice of slavery evolved along with new social theories of democracy, therefore, just as science depends on its theoretical legacy, so does morality, for “improvement of knowledge may depend upon theoretical advances in related disciplines” [Boyd, 1988, p.205]. Thus, Boyd and other realists (such as Sturgeon and Sayre-McCord) conclude that “our moral principles have observationally testable consequences when combined with appropriate background assumptions” [Sayre-McCord, 1988, p.260]. Hence, they argue that moral values are not queer entities, for they are analogous to scientific properties.

³¹ Indeed it is questionable whether scientists would refer to such entities as ‘facts’. Rather they perceive these ‘facts’ as models of the phenomena they observe.

1.4.4. A Fair Analogy?

While one may accept the parallels noted above, there are dis-analogies between moral and scientific facts which threaten such arguments. For example, Gilbert Harman comments that even though facts in both disciplines are theory-dependent, moral observation is not equivalent to scientific observation, and therefore moral facts do not have the same validity as scientific facts. Though Harman accepts that both moral and scientific observations are theory-dependent, he contends that scientific facts are not only tested against one's moral theories but are also tested by experiments which are observable "out in the world" [Harman, 1989, p.290]. Therefore, Harman argues that observation plays an additional role in science which is absent in ethics because in ethics one "need only make assumptions about the psychology or moral sensibility of the person making the moral observation" [Harman, 1989, p.291], whereas in science these assumptions are also "tested against the world" [Harman, 1989, p.291]. By way of illustration, he describes a physicist who, on seeing a vapour trail in a cloud chamber, concludes "there goes a proton" [Harman, 1989, p.291]. In such a case, the scientist is asserting not only that he belongs to "a certain psychological 'set' – given the theory he accepts and his beliefs about the experimental apparatus – but furthermore...(that)...there really was a proton going through the cloud chamber, causing the vapour trail, which he saw as a proton" [Harman, 1989, p.291]. The observation supports the theory because it provides information not only about the observer's psychology, but also about the world. However, in the ethical realm, the only relevant assumption is that the agent holds certain moral principles derived from a certain moral sensibility, and it is about these that a moral observation provides evidence, not about the world. Therefore, though both scientific and moral observation provide information about the psychological set of the observer, in science the observation provides additional information beyond this: information about physical facts.

Thus, Harman concludes that moral principles can be tested by observation in the first sense of confirming or denying one's moral theory, but "in the second sense of 'observation' moral principles cannot clearly be tested by observation, since they...do not seem to help

explain your observing what you observe" [Harman, 1989, p.292]. Therefore, he argues that "the explanatory chain from principle to observation seems to be broken in morality" [Harman, 1989, p.292] since a principle may explain why something is wrong, "but the wrongness of that act does not appear to help explain the act, which you observe, itself" [Harman, 1989, p.292]. In this manner, then, "neither the moral principle nor the wrongness of the act can help explain why you observe what you observe" [Harman, 1989, p.292]. In other words, observing the act does not explain why it is held to be wrong, but simply that the observer believes that it is wrong. Hence, he concludes that "conceived as an explanatory theory, morality, unlike science, seems to be cut off from observation" [Harman, 1989, p.293] and consequently, "the scientific realm is accessible to observation in a way the moral realm is not" [Harman, 1989, p.293].

In this manner, Harman denies that moral values or facts have a part in the explanatory chain, thereby one is ultimately returned to a theory such as Ayer's. For although moral values are observable, they are not facts in the same way that scientific facts are because they are explanatorily impotent.

Realists have responded by denying Harman's conclusion on the grounds that he does not adequately take into account the analogies drawn above which stress the theory-dependence of scientific fact, and more importantly, that he has neglected the evidence of ordinary experience. For example, Nicholas L. Sturgeon asserts that we commonly "cite moral facts as part of an explanation of nonmoral facts, and in particular of people's forming the opinions they do" [Sturgeon, 1989, p.300]. Sturgeon comments that there are "a whole range of extremely common cases...in which we cite someone's moral character as part of an explanation of his or her deeds" [Sturgeon, 1989, p.300]. To illustrate his point, Sturgeon uses the example of Hitler and asks, "isn't it plausible that Hitler's moral depravity – the fact of his really having been morally depraved – forms part of a reasonable explanation of why we believe he was depraved" [Sturgeon, 1989, p.297]. Sturgeon contends that the moral fact of Hitler's moral depravity is not irrelevant in accounting for his actions, rather, it is the key to understanding why he did what he did. Therefore, Sturgeon argues that not only are moral

facts capable of being explanatory, they can provide the best causal explanations. In this case, for example, the best explanation is that Hitler would not have done all he did if he had not been morally depraved.

In this manner, then, it is possible to claim that moral facts, far from being irrelevant, are “needed to explain our drawing the moral conclusions we do” [Sturgeon, 1989, p.298] and that “moral facts...*do* appear relevant, by perfectly ordinary standards, to the explanation of moral beliefs and of a good deal else besides” [Sturgeon, 1989, p.300]. This conclusion is echoed by Sayre-McCord, who alleges that moral properties are “firmly ensconced in the causal nexus: a bad character has notorious effects...and fair social institutions evidently affect the happiness of those in society” [Sayre-McCord, 1988, p.265]. Not only does Sturgeon claim that moral facts can be considered part of the explanatory chain, but he argues that “many moral explanations appear to be good explanations” [Sturgeon, 1989, p.299]. Merely offering an explanation is not enough, because many other theories provide possible explanations. Therefore, the validity of moral facts depends on moral explanations being the best explanations. For example, even astrological³² and occult theories might provide explanations, since, “each of these theories (when combined with appropriate background assumptions) generates testable consequences, and each makes cognitively packed claims about the world” [Sayre-McCord, 1988, p.261]. However, these theories “although testable, fail the test” [Sayre-McCord, 1988, p.261] because the phenomena which they might explain can be better explained using other means, and therefore these theories have been “left in the dust” [Sayre-McCord, 1988, p.261]. Sayre-McCord proposes that because “moral explanations allow us to isolate what it is about a person or an action or an institution that leads to it having the effect it does” [Sayre-McCord, 1988, p.276], they provide the best explanations. Therefore, it is in the ability to offer or be part of “the *best* available explanations that a hypothesis finds justification” [Sayre-McCord, 1988, p.277]. Thus, moral realists such as Sayre-McCord, Sturgeon and Boyd, all maintain that moral values are not on:

³² For example, if we return to Hitler his actions could be attributed to the fact that he was born under a certain star sign in conjunction with certain planetary motions.

any shakier ground than, say, physics, for typical microphysical hypotheses, too, have testable implications, and appear relevant to explanations, only if we are willing to assume at least the approximate truth of an elaborate microphysical theory and to hold this assumption fixed in answering counterfactual questions. [Sturgeon, 1989, p.306]

A further area where the analogy between moral properties and scientific properties breaks down is in the case of moral disagreements which, unlike scientific conflicts, appear to be perpetual and irresolvable, whereas scientific disputes are resolvable. Boyd's solution to this argument is to claim that these conflicts are not, as the anti-realists would claim³³, proof of the non-existence of moral facts. Rather, he contends that "moral inquiry...proceeds often by the analysis of complex and 'messy' naturally occurring social experiments, and is subject to a very high level of social distortion by the influence of class interests and other cultural factors" [Boyd, 1988, p.212]. Therefore, and as a direct consequence, moral inquiry – like other complex social studies – will often be hindered by non-moral difficulties to the point that "one would predict that the resolution of some issues will prove difficult or, in some particular social setting, impossible" [Boyd, 1988, p.213]. In his schema, then, the various moral standpoints of different cultures are not threatening to moral realism because "agreement on nonmoral issues would eliminate *almost all* disagreement about the sorts of moral issues which arise in ordinary moral practice" [Boyd, 1988, p.213]. As noted above, there are other reasons to explain the apparent difference between different moral positions. However, while Boyd's assertion saves the analogy between moral and scientific fact, because it presents moral properties as equivalent to natural properties it neglects the unique elements of moral properties, such as moral authority³⁴. As a result, it erodes the support of moral experience for the realist cause, therefore, even if this analogy can be justified it is possibly not the best method by which to establish moral realism.

³³ See Mackie's argument from relativity in Section 1.4.1.

³⁴ In that only a realist can properly account for the feeling that moral values 'merit' response.

1.4.5. Secondary Qualities

In response to the accusation that moral values are queer entities, some realists have resisted the temptation to equate moral values with scientific facts and have instead tried to establish them as part of the real world by drawing an analogy between them and secondary qualities such as colour.

The advantage of secondary qualities is that they are real to humans without existing in the concrete sense which objects and observable facts do. The term 'secondary qualities' applies to qualities which objects possess that have a "disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance" [McDowell, 1985, p.111]. In other words, an object possesses the disposition to look red if it looks red to the observer in certain circumstances. Secondary qualities appear to us as "properties genuinely possessed by the objects that confront one" [McDowell, 1985, p.112]. Thus, secondary qualities are subjective³⁵ in that they can only be detected if one has the appropriate receptors (in the case of colour, the eye). If one proceeds to draw an analogy between moral values and secondary qualities, then, just as experience of colour is "unintelligible except as modifications of a sensibility like ours" [McDowell, 1985, p.118], so too are moral values. Therefore, in recognising the moral property of an object, one conceives of the "object as having a property which (although there in the object) is essentially subjective in much the same way as the property that an object is represented as having by an experience of redness" [McDowell, 1985, p.118]. The perception of both colour and value depends upon the observer possessing adequate human perceptual equipment. Thus, even if one cannot establish moral facts as equivalent to natural facts, there is a case for viewing them as analogous to secondary qualities.

However, as McDowell notes, although colour and value are perceived in a similar way, there are marked differences. In particular, "a virtue (say) is conceived to be not merely such as to elicit the appropriate 'attitude' (as a colour is merely such as to cause the appropriate experiences), but rather such as to *merit* it" [McDowell, 1985, p.118]. In talking of moral

³⁵ Although, he points out that the "contrast between objective and subjective is not the contrast between veridical and illusory" [McDowell, 1985, p.113].

properties ‘meriting’ response, McDowell is referring to the experience of moral authority: the feeling that one is under obligation to act in a certain way, a feeling which appears to have an outside source.

McDowell contends that only a realist thesis can explain why situations ‘merit’ response. For example, fear, though not a value, shares the crucial features: it can only be perceived by a certain sensibility and it ‘merits’ a response. Accepting that a situation ‘merits’ response entails that “we make sense of fear by seeing it as a response to objects that *merit* such a response, or as the intelligibly defective product of a propensity towards responses that would be intelligible in that way” [McDowell, 1985, p.119]³⁶. McDowell claims that there is some property of the object which induces the response of fear in those who have a human sensibility, and thus “for an object to merit fear is for it to be fearful” [McDowell, 1985, p.119]. McDowell grants that other views, such as a projectivist thesis, appear to be able to account well for the phenomena of fear, presumably especially so in the case of irrational fears and phobias, in which the fear is disproportionate to the object inciting the fear. However, he surmises that such explanations are not satisfactory because they fail to make sense of what is being explained. Therefore, the projectivist conception, namely, that “reality contains nothing in the way of fearfulness” [McDowell, 1985, p.119] because fearfulness is a projection of emotion, is false. Thus, the projectivist’s position is incompatible with experience, because experience leads one to conclude that fear is a response to an object which one has reason to be afraid of.

McDowell claims that such reasoning supports his realist conception, and though it does stretch the analogy he continues to assert that the most satisfactory way of conceiving of moral values is as akin to secondary qualities. Construing values in this manner means that though values are properties of the real world, they will not always be grasped correctly because they depend on human perception. Thus, there is a subjective element in perceiving moral values accurately, which depends upon one’s ‘moral sensibility’. For McDowell, one’s moral sensibility is the perceptual capacity to recognise moral values. This capacity

³⁶ i.e. that phobias are a defective over-reaction to something that does merit fear.

differs in different people and is capable of being improved upon. However, though there is a subjective element, he maintains that this should not “stop him supposing, of some of his evaluative responses, that their objects really do merit them” [McDowell, 1985, p.120]. He argues that this subjective element, just “as with colours...does not stop us supposing that they are there independently of any particular apparent experience of them” [McDowell, 1985, p.120]. He maintains that the acceptance of such properties, like values and secondary qualities which rely upon perception, are necessary, and “if we restrict ourselves to explanations from a more external standpoint, at which values are not in our field of view, we deprive ourselves of a kind of intelligibility” [McDowell, 1985, p.120]. Therefore, McDowell is happy to allow an element of subjectivity in the recognition of moral values, even though this actively encourages the criticism, levelled by Mackie, that the realist relies upon a special form of intuition, or in the case of McDowell, the adoption of a ‘sensitivity’. Not only does McDowell’s thesis suggest an element of subjectivity which goes beyond those who equate value with ordinary scientific fact – and in this sense undermines the claims of previous realists – but he introduces the notion of ‘meriting’ response which anti-realists take as further proof that moral values are queer entities. Therefore, criticisms are made by fellow realists (such as Dancy) who see his suggestion that moral values are analogous to secondary qualities as impairing the realist claim.

Dancy argues that by making moral values analogous to secondary qualities, McDowell has presented a ‘weak’ form of realism, in that instead of moral values being thought of as existing independently, moral properties “are there waiting to be experienced” [Dancy, 1986, p.168]. In other words, in the weak form, a subjective account has been adopted, for “beings that do not share in those concerns could not make any sense of the way of carving up the world that our moral vocabulary represents” [Dancy, 1986, p.168]. Thus, Dancy argues that McDowell has “provided an effective argument that moral concepts are subjective” [Dancy, 1986, p.168], in that they are anthropomorphic and only grasped by human perception. For Dancy, such a form of realism is no realism at all, and he insists that “the only possible form of moral realism lies in the stronger conception” [Dancy, 1986, p.171]. Consequently, he

rejects McDowell's analogy of secondary qualities as "not a form of moral realism at all" [Dancy, 1986, p.171]. The reason Dancy gives for such a strong rebuttal is that the analogy with secondary qualities undermines the argument from moral phenomenology and the premise that "moral value...(is)...part of the fabric of the world" [Dancy, 1986, p.172]. Dancy contends that if weak realism is adopted, "it is hard to make good sense...of the idea that moral properties can be experienced" [Dancy, 1986, p.174]. The difficulty, as Dancy sees it, is that any experiences which are the "effects of a disposition in the objects to cause those experiences in us, do not seem to be experiences *of* that disposition" [Dancy, 1986, p.174]. Thus, he is suspicious of McDowell's approach, as moral experiences, "seem to be more like manifestations of the disposition than experiences of it" [Dancy, 1986, p.174]. If this suspicion is justified, Dancy believes that it will undermine the whole concept of moral experience because it destroys the realist assertion that realism is supported by the experience of moral values.

1.4.6. Impasse

Thus, there is no final conclusion as to whether or not moral properties are queer entities. None of the methods discussed adequately restores a realist conception of value. McDowell's analogy of secondary qualities makes an admirable attempt at offering an alternative conception. However, as Dancy notes, there are difficulties in conceiving of values in a more subjective mode. All sides assert that they have dismissed the opposition's argument; the realists claim that they have established moral values as facts and the anti-realists continue to deny this. In fact, if one looks at the endless trail of argument and counter-argument in the journals concerned with these issues, one could be forgiven for thinking that there will never be a solution to the problem. Thus, continuing in the traditional argument and counter-argument seems, at least for the purpose of this study, to be a fruitless exercise. Furthermore, the realists' denial that moral values are queer entities has led them to place increased emphasis upon the qualities of moral properties which are most similar to scientific properties. Such a move puts them in danger of negating the qualities of moral properties which are revealed by experience and are distinctive, such as moral authority.

Therefore, the analogy with scientific properties, even secondary qualities, may not be the best way for moral realism to be established. However, studying the debate has shown that, despite the predominance of the anti-realist view in contemporary philosophy, the possibility of realism remains. In addition, the discussion of the theory-dependent nature of scientific fact suggests that even in science, 'facts' (and more so theories) cannot be held to be clear and unambiguous, a point which is ignored by many anti-realist (and certainly non-cognitivist) philosophers.

1.4.7. A False Dichotomy

If one steps outside the usual confines of this debate, it is tempting to comment that the difficulty here is that the realists have wholeheartedly accepted the premise behind the anti-realist criticisms. The realists have adopted, rather than attacked, the anti-realist premise that values cannot be counted as real unless they have the characteristics of scientific fact. If the realists are to establish a different conception of moral value, then the more sensible course is to reject the fact/value dichotomy and accept that values are queer entities if, and only if, everything that is not a scientific fact is counted as a queer entity. If this is the case, either it must be conceded that many of the markers by which human lives are lived, and evaluations made, are 'queer' (including many scientific assumptions), or alternatively a vast amount of the common interpretations that are currently accepted as valid must be dismissed. This attempt seems to have been at least part of the impetus behind McDowell's analogy with secondary qualities – the wish not to be tied to a view of scientific, observable fact as the only kind of fact. However, while McDowell does not attempt to allot the characteristics of scientific facts to values, his analogy with secondary qualities still places him within a scientific framework. He has accepted the premise that the only way to prove moral realism is to equate moral values as akin to some sort of other facts which are not queer.

The answer to establishing moral values as real and knowable lies in rejecting the premise which both sides of this debate assume. Both sides have accepted a very narrow (even in scientific terms) definition of what constitute facts. Moral values may not be facts in the

‘vapour trail’ sense, but they are reasons why individuals act the way they do. By tying themselves into the acceptance of the fact/value dichotomy and to scientific classifications, realists may have lost their best chance of denying the anti-realist case. Thus, it seems that realists should not engage in the debate about moral facts at the present level, but should attack the underlying assumptions and assert that though moral values may not be facts in a scientific sense this does not mean that they are queer entities, nor does it mean that they are not real. Therefore, the best course for the realists is to attack the base of non-cognitivism which asserts that facts are always quasi-scientific and therefore distinct from moral values.

1.5. Motivation

The difficulties surrounding the possibility of moral facts is not the only topic which the realist must address. The other crucial problem is that of motivation, so much so that Dancy refers to it as a “special problem for cognitivists” [Dancy, 1993, p.22]. Before leaving the philosophical debate this matter must be explored.

1.5.1. Belief/Desire

The model of motivation which is generally assumed by contemporary philosophers is grounded in Humean psychology, which divides beliefs from desire. Beliefs represent the world as it is, and are open to rational criticism, whereas desires are one’s wishes for the future and are therefore not true or false but open to rational criticism only in so far as they are based on belief. Moral judgements express beliefs about the situation, but the agent will only act on these beliefs if he has the desire to do so. Therefore, in order for an action to occur, both must be present; for a belief without desire is “impotent” and a desire without belief is “blind” [Dancy, 1993, p.2]. According to this theory, whether or not the agent acts upon his belief depends entirely on the strength (or lack of strength) of the desire. This model is a non-cognitive model in that whether one acts or not entirely depends upon whether one has the desire (i.e. an additional emotion) to act, and not upon the facts of the case.

The adoption of such a model has made explaining motivation problematic for realists who are generally cognitivists, and in the main realists have opted for one of two theories: externalism or internalism.

Externalism adopts the Humean belief/desire division. Therefore, while asserting there are moral facts, the externalist argues that motivation arises not from these facts but from external factors. Such reasoning results in the situation – akin to that of the anti-realist – that in order for moral action to occur, a desire must be present. Externalists argue that this does not make moral action entirely independent of moral facts, for “the vast majority of people will have at least some desire to comply with what they perceive to be their moral obligations” [Brink, 1989a, p.49]. The difficulty with this reading is that, as with the anti-realist position, by relying on desire as the only motivating force there is a severe difficulty in accounting for moral experience, in particular moral authority.

Internalists solve the problem of motivation by rejecting the belief/desire theory altogether. Instead of explaining motivation by recourse to a desire, they argue that there is “an internal or conceptual connection between moral considerations and action or the sources of action” [Brink, 1989a, p.38]. The contention is that “moral considerations necessarily motivate or provide reasons for action” [Brink, 1989, p.42]; no additional motivation is necessary. Such an interpretation fits well with concepts such as moral demand. However, it does not explain why moral considerations do not always motivate an agent to act. According to the internalist thesis, it is not possible to act in a way contrary to one’s moral beliefs, for it is “inconceivable that someone could recognise a moral fact and remain unmoved or fail to have reason to act” [Brink, 1989a, p.43]. However, moral experience tells us this is not the case, and hence amorality³⁷ and immorality provide perplexing problems for the internalist.

³⁷ An amoralist recognises the existence of moral considerations and remains unmoved. Strong amorality would deny that the agent had any reason to be moral, whereas weak amorality would deny that the agent had sufficient reason. Therefore, the strong amoralist is totally indifferent and the weak amoralist is insufficiently motivated.

1.5.2. Cognitive Motivation

It seems that if one is truly to argue that moral values are real, then they must motivate by themselves, and though this does not have to exclude the notion of desire it must not depend upon desire alone.

1.5.2.1. *Analogy with Prudential Reasons*

McDowell attempts to show that moral values are real and motivational, and to explain why, if this is the case, that they do not always motivate an agent to action. For McDowell, no additional desire is necessary in order to motivate an agent to action, and in this sense he is an internalist. McDowell's contention is that reasons motivate one to act, for "it seems plausible that if one accepts that one should do something, one accepts that one has a reason to do it" [McDowell, 1978, p.14]. Therefore, in acting morally one does not blindly believe that one 'should' act in a certain way, but rather that there are reasons for acting in that way. Consequently, when one justifies a moral act, one "will at least include a mention of what one takes to be relevant features of the circumstances in which the action is to be performed" [McDowell, 1978, p.14]. These kind of considerations lead McDowell to surmise that the moral requirements are imposed by the circumstances, and that it is "possible to defend the thesis that virtuous actions are dictated by non-hypothetical imperatives without committing ourselves to the insane thesis that simply to say 'You should...' to someone is enough to give him a reason for acting" [McDowell, 1978, p.14]. Thus, for McDowell, reasons are motivating, and it is moral reasons which provide one with the desire to act. Consequently, he deems it "false that the motivating power of all reasons derives from their including desires" [McDowell, 1978, p.15]. His theory does not deny that desires may be a part of one's reason to act, in that, if an agent thought that acting in a certain manner would be in his interest, then he has a reason to act in this way. This reason could be described in terms of desire, for example, a desire for long-term happiness. However, "the desire does not function as an independent extra component in a full specification of his reason" [McDowell, 1978, p.15]. In accrediting a person with a desire in these circumstances, the

claim is simply that the circumstances give sufficient reason for action, thereby providing the agent with the desire to act. By such means it is possible to explain motivation using the belief/desire model, but this is not the best method because it separates belief from desire, rather than accepting that reasons can lead to desires. McDowell argues that explanations for moral action take the form of reasons which “purport...to show the favourable light in which an agent saw his action” [McDowell, 1978, p.18]. Furthermore, McDowell points out that this is not only a different way of describing motivation, but in casting reasons as motivations one can see that there need not “*always* be an independently intelligible desire” [McDowell, 1978, p.20]

Having asserted that reasons can indeed be motivational, he further states that this does not mean that they are always motivating because the virtuous person can see reasons which are hidden from the non-virtuous person. Thus, he attempts to counter the assumption that reasons, if capable of motivation, should always motivate, stating that “we can evade this argument by denying its premise: that is, by taking a special view of the virtuous person’s conception of the circumstances...which...cannot be shared by someone who sees no reason to act as the virtuous person does” [McDowell, 1978, p.16]. McDowell illustrates his hypothesis using prudential behaviour as an example, which he postulates as analogous to moral behaviour.

In prudential behaviour, McDowell observes that reasons are considered capable of motivating in certain circumstances, but not in all circumstances. There are times when an agent fails to see the prudential reasons for action, therefore, even though the reasons are present, they are not apparent to the agent who remains unmoved. However, these same reasons may motivate another person, a more prudent person, in similar circumstances. In such a situation, McDowell attests that motivation, or the desire to act on prudential reasons, is not “a further component, over and above the prudent person’s conception of the likely effects of his action on his own future” [McDowell, 1978, p.16]. Hence, motivation depends on whether and how one conceives of the facts. Thus, McDowell surmises that in the case of a prudent action, “we comprehend his prudent behaviour by comprehending the relevant

fragment of his world view, not by appealing to the desire which is admittedly ascribable to him” [McDowell, 1978, p.17]. McDowell maintains that precisely this model – of reasons as motivating – is transferable to the ethical sphere. Just as one needs to have a certain outlook to recognise prudential reasons, so in the moral sphere, in order to act, the agent must possess the ability “to see situations in a special light, as constituting reasons for acting” [McDowell, 1978, p.21]. A virtuous person is one who has a certain ‘perceptual capacity’ which can be exercised in varied circumstances, both foreseen and unforeseen. If this is the case, not only is desire not always necessary to understand motivation, but “there will be some actions which simply cannot be explained as the outcomes of...desires” [McDowell, 1978, p.21]. Nor, he contends, if one believes motivation is by desire only, will one have a full comprehension of virtuous acts.

McDowell supports his case by recourse to moral experience, and he points out that in order to change a person’s moral views, one attempts to make that person see the situation “in the special way in which a virtuous person would see it” [McDowell, 1978, p.21]. Such a method shows that the key is finding a means by which the agent can be shown the existence of moral reasons. Such a method, McDowell argues, is not an appeal to emotion, for there are “insufficient grounds for concluding that they are appeals to passion as opposed to reason” [McDowell, 1978, p.22], but an appeal to specifically moral reasons. Therefore, “failure to see reason to act virtuously stems, not from the lack of a desire on which the rational influence of moral requirements is conditional, but from the lack of a distinctive way of seeing situations” [McDowell, 1978, p.23]. If this perceptual capacity is lacking, or if an agent fails to exercise it, this does not mean that the agent is behaving irrationally. Hence, he accepts that moral requirements are hypothetical in that they are not recognised as categorical by all rational people. Nonetheless, agents who have the perceptual capacity to see a situation in a moral light will be motivated. For McDowell, then, moral requirements are “hypothetical only in this truistic sense: they sway only those who *have* them” [McDowell, 1978, p.23]. Thus, values are real properties that provide motivating reasons for action, yet, whether or not they motivate depends upon the agent’s perceptual capacity.

However, though McDowell convincingly asserts that moral values can motivate an agent to act, in order to account for why they do not always do so he is forced to postulate a special 'virtuous' perceptual capacity, returning one to the criticism that values are queer entities because they are detected by a special faculty of intuition. It is possible to counter that this is a problem only if one continues to attempt to equate moral values with scientific facts. If one adopts a wider framework one could argue that many 'special faculties' are used in the course of understanding and interpreting the world, not only to detect moral values, but to detect emotional states, psychological conditions and the nuances of conversation. Hence, if one moves outside the boundaries of this debate one could reject the anti-realist criticisms. Yet, because McDowell remains inside the parameters of the debate he simply invites the queer entity/special intuition criticism.

1.5.2.2. *Salient Reasons and Shape*

Other realists attempt to claim that moral reasons are motivating without adopting any distinctively moral perceptual capacity, and so avoid the criticisms levelled at McDowell. For example, Dancy rejects both the Humean belief/desire model and McDowell's thesis, putting in their place his own "'pure' cognitive theory" [Dancy, 1993, p.18].

Dancy hypothesises that there are two distinct 'representations' which characterise a moral judgement: "the first of these...represent[s] the world as it now is, and the second...represent[s] the world as it will be when and if the action is successfully completed" [Dancy, 1993, p.14]. The gap between the two representations, Dancy suggests, could be identified with desire in the Humean theory. For example, in the case of lust – a non-cognitive state – one could "insist that what motivates the luster is not the lust but the combination of two representations, the 'before' and 'after'" [Dancy, 1993, p.19]. However, even if the gap is equated with Humean desire – i.e. a desire is ascribed to the achievement of the second representation – the desire is still not causal. For, "though desire is necessary for motivation, the occurrence of a desire is never what motivates" [Dancy, 1993, p.19]. Thus, it is the gap which motivates, and the "occurrence of the desire is *the agent's being*

motivated by that gap” [Dancy, 1993, p.19]. Dancy is not denying that desires exist and can motivate, but, he is denying that “the desire must be (part of) what motivates the agent” [Dancy, 1993, p.30]. Dancy proposes that “there are no such things as Humean beliefs and desires. Instead of these internally and externally motivating states, there are what we might call *intrinsically* motivating states” [Dancy, 1993, pp.23-24]. These states, he suggests, can be present without motivating, but when they do motivate they do so in their own right. His premise is that a state may fail to motivate in one case simply because in the circumstances it is insufficient. For example, he alleges that, “what are reasons *here* may not be the same reasons *there*” [Dancy, 1993, p.24], due to the additional presence of other reasons. Therefore, whether or not reasons motivate depends upon the circumstances and background conditions. Hence, a state though capable of motivating may not always do so. Thus, one should “allow the possibility of a cognitive state being sufficient for action without supposing that wherever it occurs the action must follow” [Dancy, 1993, p.22]. If one endorses such a model of intrinsically motivating states, then the distinction of internalism or externalism is removed, for “the theory we have ended up with is neither internalist nor externalist” [Dancy, 1993, p.25]. Moreover, the ‘pure cognitive’ theory of intrinsically motivating states can account for ‘weakness’ of the will – why an agent fails to act when he thinks that he should. Consequently, Dancy declares that his model is “clearly superior” [Dancy, 1993, p.26] to the alternative realist theories.

Hence, for Dancy, it is facts which motivate, and these should not be equated with Humean beliefs because moral reasons and emotions also count as facts. Instead, “what motivates is the matter of fact believed, not the believing of it” [Dancy, 1993, p.32]. For Dancy, it is facts which provide reasons for action; “reasons...lie in the nature of one’s surroundings, not in the fact that one believes those surroundings to be this way rather than that” [Dancy, 1993, p.32]. To conceive of facts as motivating factors one must accept that “the world is *not motivationally inert*” [Dancy, 1993, p.32]. Facts are present in the world and constitute reasons for actions. Beliefs are both “representations of the world and...reasons to change the world” [Dancy, 1993, p.33], and likewise, the fact which provides a reason for action is

“true to (or part of) that world, and a reason for changing it” [Dancy, 1993, p.34]. For Dancy, all facts can potentially be moral reasons for action, and it is for this reason that he rejects McDowell’s claims, because he speaks of moral and prudential reasons as different from other reasons. In contrast, Dancy asserts that his theory “is especially aimed at showing that there is nothing very special about moral reasons” [Dancy, 1993, p.18]. Therefore, moral reasons are not dissimilar to everyday reasons for action, and they “don’t differ from others in content; they differ rather in style” [Dancy, 1993, p.44]. Moral reasons “represent actions either as required in themselves or as required for a required aim” [Dancy, 1993, p.47]. Moral reasons, then, are “just ordinary considerations such as his distress or the loss to her self-respect” [Dancy, 1993, p.115], which, because of background reasons and the disposition of the agent, exert a demand. Moral properties and moral reasons are manifested, according to Dancy, in the particular circumstances of a case and are dependent upon the context.

In making any moral decision, Dancy argues that “some of the properties of a situation are relevant to the question what one should do, and some are not...(and)...some are more relevant than others” [Dancy, 1993, p.112]. Relevant features in any case Dancy terms ‘salient’; if a reason is salient then it makes “a difference to what one should do in the case before one” [Dancy, 1993, p.112]. In any situation there will be many salient reasons which will be related to each other in various ways, and the task of the agent is to “grasp the *shape* of the circumstances” [Dancy, 1993, p.112]. Being able to grasp the situation correctly means recognising the reasons in the correct pattern. Moral properties such as goodness, badness, etc., “are not further properties just like the others” [Dancy, 1993, p.115] which make up the shape, but they emerge from, or are constituted by, the whole shape. Hence, a moral property such as to “see an action’s being right or one which ought to be done...(is)...identical with the *shape* of the circumstances” [Dancy, 1993, p.115]. Therefore, in order for Dancy to assert that moral reasons are ordinary ‘mundane’ reasons he has to abandon the notion that ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are qualities themselves. Good, for example, is made up of the combination of other properties, and though it is the ‘shape’ in this example,



no single moral reason is that 'it is good'; good is a product rather than a material of the situation. Hence, moral values such as goodness are collective terms for a conglomeration of reasons and not salient reasons themselves.

Using the metaphors of salience and shape, Dancy proceeds to describe the way in which moral conflicts and dilemmas are solved. He likens a moral situation to telling a narrative: "to justify one's choice is to give the reasons one sees for making it, and to give those reasons is just to lay out how one sees the situation...as persuasively as one can" [Dancy, 1993, p.113]. A salient feature in one case will not necessarily be salient in another case. Salience will depend on the other features and how they are related: on the narrative, on how the story is told. Hence, the "salience of a feature is a matter of context; alter the context and what was salient may cease to be so or begin to play a different role in the story which captures the action's overall shape" [Dancy, 1993, pp.114-115]. Both reasons for and against action are salient features of any given situation. Therefore, in moral conflict and dilemma there are always reasons why the agent fails to act (acting instead on other reasons). These reasons he terms 'defeated reasons'. He argues that if there is moral conflict, then two or more moral reasons have a claim on the agent. The reasons which are defeated – which the agent fails to act upon – do not cease to represent a moral claim. Defeated reasons, for Dancy, are part of the shape of the decision, and though not acted upon they remain. It is these reasons which account for the experience of regret, even when one judges that one has performed the best possible action in a circumstance. For Dancy, then, moral reasons are ordinary facts which influence the way an agent acts. The moral property in any circumstance is constituted by the shape of the features of any situation; "the metaphors of shape and salience lie at the centre of my approach" [Dancy, 1993, p.114]. Dancy contends that not only has he provided an account of moral properties and described cognitive motivation, but also that his theory accounts best for moral conflict, dilemma and regret.

Dancy's view of morals as reasons leads him to advocate a form of particularism to which he is attracted, because it provides a "holistic view of the behaviour of reasons" [Dancy, 1993, p.60], and allows a flexible response to different cases. Consistency, he asserts, is

ensured by adopting the same approach in all situations. His claim is that though similar facts may not produce the same acts in different circumstances, as long as one always looks closely at the facts, consistency will be maintained. Dancy accepts that his theory may be accused of lacking coherence, however, a lack of coherence is a price he is willing to accept in order to take each situation individually. He opposes generalism, suggesting that “generalism encourages a tendency not to look hard enough at the details of the case before one, quite apart from any over-simplistic tendency to rely on a few rules of dubious provenance” [Dancy, 1993, p.64]. He does not deny that one can learn from other similar cases, but to appeal directly to other cases can “pre-empt the authority of the present case” [Dancy, 1993, p.65].

By using the mechanisms of salience and shape, Dancy claims to have offered an account of motivation which is not open, as McDowell’s schema is, to accusations that moral values are queer entities. Indeed, Dancy is at pains to present moral reasons as entirely mundane reasons, and those qualities which one tends to think of as ‘moral values’ are only present in the ‘shape’. The criticisms of such a thesis are plain, in that for many this does not support but weakens the realist cause. For if moral values such as ‘good’, ‘bad’, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ are determined by the situation, despite his protestation, it is difficult to see how his particularism is saved from relativism. Thus, in escaping the anti-realist criticisms he has presented a relativistic realism which many would see as a contradiction of moral realism; since values are obviously real if they are mundane reasons, but it is not clear that they are authoritative or objective.

1.5.3. A False Dichotomy

Thus, both Dancy and McDowell, in countering one anti-realist criticism have fallen prey to another. However, both have brought to light key facts surrounding the argument for a realist conception of motivation. Not least, both signal effectively to the falsity of the Humean model of motivation and forcibly assert that reasons can and do motivate. The contrast of belief and desire they recognise as a false dichotomy, and they both move in

different ways to reject it. Dancy, in particular, overtly claims that emotions such as distress are part of the facts of the case and part of what causes desire. Therefore, these philosophers have gone some way to providing a realist conception of moral value. However, though rejecting some of the assumptions of the debate, they have not entirely escaped the fact/value divide upon which the belief/desire model is built. Although rejecting the Humean model of motivation, they are both at pains to ensure that values are normalised, which is just another way of trying to present a case for values not being queer entities. This is seen in McDowell's analogy of prudential reasons, and in Dancy's refusal to add any concept such as 'goodness' to his list of salient reasons (reasons must be mundane). Thus, it seems fair to conclude that these realists have set off along the path to asserting a moral realism but they have not fully realised their aim.

1.6. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the state of the debate with regard to the realism of moral values. Though progress has been made in the attempt to claim a moral realism, the confines of the debate have restricted the claims which philosophers are willing to make for moral realism. Furthermore, the effect of the limitations of the debate and the premises which both sides adopt present the reader with a limp construct of moral values, and though the realists constantly cite moral authority as supporting realism, the theories which they outline lack the strength which one associates with moral authority. The reason for this, as discussed in the body of the chapter, is primarily that realists have accepted the premises of their opponents, in particular, that if values are real then they must be equivalent to some other sort of facts. If realists could make moral values equivalent to scientific facts they would, in fact, have succeeded in arguing away the factors which make moral facts unique and significant. The primary argument for moral realism lies in the argument from experience, which highlights moral authority, and if one removes this distinctly moral aspect then the danger is that one removes the strength of the realist position. In order for moral realism to be established, moral realists must attack the underlying assumptions and insist that moral values are 'real' nonetheless. This move would also allow a more holistic conception of human choosing and

of the effect of moral values in everyday life. In an effort to find alternative models for conceptualising moral values, and to further explore the possibility of moral realism, this study will move outside the confines of the contemporary philosophical debate into the realms of art and religion, both of which have been traditionally connected to moral value.

Chapter Two: Religion and Moral Realism

2.1. Introduction

The last chapter explored current philosophical thinking concerning the nature of moral value and language in order to set the relationship of morality and religion in the context of the authoritative philosophical debate. The terminology and concepts elucidated in Chapter One are utilised and referred to throughout the thesis. This chapter proceeds to examine received conceptions of the relationship between morality and religion.

Moral realism has traditionally been bolstered and sustained by the belief that moral values originate from the commands of God. By such means, the objectivity and absoluteness of moral values has been guaranteed. From the Enlightenment onward there have been moves to sever this direct connection between God's commands and moral value. However, even if such a relationship is not endorsed "the connections between morality and religion are numerous, close and controversial" [Helm, 1981, p.1] and, as this chapter will reveal, despite the dominance of divine command theories, there are alternative ways in which the relationship can be conceived.

2.2. Moral Values as God's Commands

2.2.1. Divine Command Theories

The most frequent way in which religion has been related to morality is that moral values have been presumed to derive from the divine commands of God. A moral theory of divine command is the hypothesis that moral values are real and binding because God wills them so, and therefore it is God's will which makes an action morally right or wrong. Different types of divine command theory can be distinguished by subdividing them into strong and weak versions: in strong³⁸ versions, divine command is the whole reason for moral values,

³⁸ In the strong version "divine choice is the defining condition of moral reality; not the other way around" [Johnson, 1994, p.42].

and in weak³⁹ versions the will of God is only part of the reason for morality being as it is. In essence, divine command theories are “formulated using only three basic concepts; they are the notions of ethical requirement, ethical permission and ethical prohibition” [Quinn, 1978, p.26]. According to strong divine command theories, acts are required if and only if God commands them, forbidden if and only if God forbids them, and permitted if and only if God does not forbid them. In the ‘strong’ theory, God can command or forbid any act he chooses. God’s will is the only factor in determining what is and what is not moral. For example, “if God were to command that Smith tortures children then it would be required that Smith tortures children” [Quinn, 1978, p.31].

Connecting moral value directly to the will of God appears to be a simple and effective way of explaining the relationship between morality and religion. By conceiving of morality as dependent on the will of God, moral values are outside human control and thus established as real, absolute and objective. The attraction of this thesis lies in part in its simplicity and the ease with which it secures moral realism, however, further examination reveals that this theory is not without its difficulties.

2.2.2. The Euthyphro Criticism

Of all the criticisms of this position (many of which will be discussed in this chapter) there is one which stands apart as an ever-present background to the divine command theory, and has constantly recurred, with greater or lesser force, dating from before the dawn of Christian theism itself. This criticism, concerned with the problem of conceiving of the origins of moral values as divine fiats, is elucidated by Plato in the *Euthyphro*.

The crux of the difficulty lies in Socrates’ question: “Whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved of the gods?” [Euthyphro, 10, Vol. 2, p.84]. The dilemma of the *Euthyphro* is that neither answer provides an entirely

³⁹ In the weak version there are other reasons which influence the nature of morality, such as that “God issues the commands that he does because of his independent knowledge of the nature of right and wrong” [Johnson, 1994, p.43].

satisfactory option. If one chooses the second horn of the dilemma, which is consistent with a strong theory of divine command and portrays moral values as arising from the will of God (or in Plato's case 'the gods'), then one is open to the criticism that values are arbitrary, in the sense that God chooses moral values for no reason other than he wishes to, and consequently, he could replace them with other values if he so desired. This results in the situation that at any given moment values could be changed or reversed, and one morality replaced with another; all entirely at the discretion of the divinity. Some theorists⁴⁰, while wishing to maintain God's will as at least part of the reason as to why values are the way they are, do not wish to maintain that values could simply be reversed by a divine whim. Those who find the consequences⁴¹ of the second horn of the *Euthyphro* unpalatable must instead consider the first horn, the possibility that the gods love what is holy because it is so, or in the more familiar language of divine command theories, that God commands good because it is good. The option of choosing this answer to the dilemma is only available to a weak divine command theorist, because only in a weak theory is it possible for other considerations than the will of God to affect what is moral. The complication in taking this option is that the addition of further premises or factors other than God's will admits the possibility that there is a standard of morality to which even God must adhere. While rescuing God from criticisms of arbitrariness and ensuring the integrity of moral motivation, the extension of divine command theory beyond God's will implies that God must adhere to a standard not of his own making. This dilemma set out by Plato in the *Euthyphro* pre-empts many of the difficulties which divine command theories face, and has placed what many philosophers believe to be an insurmountable obstacle at its heart. Despite this, however, the divine command theory has continued to be the most frequently used model of the relationship between religion and morality in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

⁴⁰ Such as Quinn and Adams.

⁴¹ The consequences being that God is arbitrary and even capricious.

2.2.3. Response to the Euthyphro Criticism

In recent times there has been a revival of interest in divine command theories among theologians and some philosophers. This group of theologians steadfastly maintain either that the Euthyphro criticism was never as effective as it has been thought to be, or that there are other versions of divine command theory which escape the criticism of arbitrariness and the consequent equation of morality with the will of God. Such theologians reckon that “philosophers have not succeeded in refuting certain divine command theories, and, therefore, are not justified in rejecting them” [Quinn, 1978, p.23].

Those who defend the strong theory regard the criticism that it portrays God as capricious and arbitrary as presumptuous. They do not accept that the terms ‘arbitrary’ and ‘capricious’ are applicable to God because his actions and reasons are so far beyond human comprehension that any attempt to reason about the mind of God is doomed to failure and verges on blasphemy. Any limitation of God’s power, especially by the flawed standards of human reason, they dismiss, and see no difficulty in accepting that good is only good because God so commands; no human restrictions or labels should be put upon the greatness and power of God.

Nevertheless, despite these protestations, unqualified acceptance of the second horn of the dilemma is problematic for many because it makes it impossible for humans to use their reason to determine what is moral. Furthermore, if values can be changed or overturned by the whim of God, values have no authority except the authority of God’s will. Therefore, while the divine command theory asserts that values are ‘real’, they are not objective or absolute. There is nothing in the nature of good, as such, which commends it over bad other than that God demands it. Such a conclusion many simply cannot accept.

Not only is the second horn of the dilemma open to the accusation of arbitrariness with regard to the values God chooses, but also to those whom his commands are directed. In strong divine command theories moral judgements are not universalisable. Therefore, the

standard convention that if a moral judgement is correct in one situation it will be correct in other relevantly similar situations does not apply. God can choose to enforce or disregard moral rules as and when he wishes. A scriptural example is found in the story of Abraham and Isaac⁴². If Abraham's judgement to kill Isaac were universalisable, then infanticide (or at least the decision to commit infanticide) would be deemed correct and "divine command theories...(would)...seem to wind up by condoning or even encouraging evil" [Quinn, 1978, p.54]. The divine command theorist, by contrast, suggests that Abraham's seemingly immoral action was justified because it was commanded directly by God. Accordingly, the receipt of a specific command justifies Abraham's action; without such a command his action would be wrong. Thus, universalisation can be applied, in that it is wrong to commit infanticide unless this moral norm is overridden by a specific divine command. If we universalise Abraham's situation, then anyone who received the same direct command would be justified in acting in the manner in which Abraham did. Hence, Quinn proposes that "some of the generalisations gotten from divine command theories by universalising particular moral judgements warranted by the theory may be very limited in scope; maybe only one person is ever commanded by God to perform a certain action" [Quinn, 1978, p.55].

Such a retort does not negate the charge of arbitrariness, even if it does provide a mechanism for universalisation. The accusation of arbitrariness remains in that one person is exempt from the moral code and another is not, purely according to divine will. In addition to failing to remove the charge of arbitrariness, there are further obvious difficulties with such positions. In particular, there is the issue of how commands are communicated. The underlying assumption of divine command theories is that the commands of God are clear. However, when we consider the reality of the situation this is not the case. Even those who claim to follow God's commands as revealed in the Bible are faced with conflicting passages and different interpretations. Knowing the commands of God becomes even more complex

⁴² It is worth noting that though this example is commonly employed in the debate about divine command theories, commentators always treat it in a literal manner. No account of cultural factors (such as the tradition of sacrificing first-born children) or of other more metaphorical interpretations is taken.

when tradition, denomination and personal religious experience are added to the picture. Not only is the task of deciphering the commands of God in general a difficult one, but further problems are created if God can override these general commands with specific commands to individuals, as he did with Abraham. In such a situation one has only the individual's testimony, and there is no way of verifying a person's assertion that they received commands from God⁴³. The dangers of such interpretations are abundantly clear. Any immoral act can be justified by the claim that one is doing God's will, since conventional moral values and norms will not constrain or influence an individual who believes that he is acting upon a higher authority. Therefore, people will carry out immoral acts and atrocities which they would regard as immoral if they lacked the justification of divine sanction. The example of Abraham and Isaac is a perfect instance, in that an immoral act was considered morally correct because it was commanded by God⁴⁴. Consequently, any immoral action is justifiable by the profession that it is God's will – a belief responsible for much of the evil and cruelty in human history⁴⁵. Thus, according to divine command theories values are not objective but are relative to the whims of God. Consequently, rather than establishing moral realism, divine command theories threaten the absolute nature of moral values.

2.2.4. God and Good

These consequences have led certain scholars to deny the validity of divine command theories and regard them as dangerous. Such theorists elevate human moral reasoning and judgements in order to preserve the authority of the moral norm, and to prevent individuals committing immoral acts and then using the excuse that they were commanded by God. The defence, 'I was only following orders' is no defence in human courts⁴⁶ because it is not accepted that orders negate one's own responsibility. Even if the orders are from God one is still responsible and accountable for one's own actions. The notion that a command cannot

⁴³ Although this depends upon one's denomination, as many churches have traditions which regulate and judge whether commands are from God.

⁴⁴ In addition, the moral character of God is brought into question as God in the story behaves more like a jealous lover than a perfectly good being; 'Sacrifice your son to prove you love me!'

⁴⁵ Moreover, a belief which is entirely exclusivist precludes communication between different groups who all believe that only they have access to the correct commands of God.

⁴⁶ A principle firmly enshrined throughout history and made sacrosanct in the Nuremberg trials.

take away personal responsibility, even if it comes from God, is borne out by the fact that if one believes God has commanded a certain action “it still makes *sense*...to ask whether or not I *ought* to do it” [Nowell-Smith, 1966, p.97]. Therefore, even if the divine command thesis is endorsed, the element of personal responsibility and judgement remains, for “we must quite unavoidably use our own moral insight to decide that God’s acts are good” [Nielsen, 1982, p.339]. Without using moral reason and knowledge of value, even the believer could not know “that God is good, except by what is in the end his own quite fallible moral judgement” [Nielsen, 1982, p.338]. Therefore, one must employ human reason, even with regard to the commands of God, for just:

as we could not apply the predicate ‘women’ to wives, if we did not first understand what women are...so we could not apply the predicate ‘good’ to God unless we already understood what it meant to say that something was good unless we had some criterion of goodness. [Nielsen, 1982, p.340]

If it is the case that one must understand what ‘good’ is before it can be applied to God, then it follows that our concept of goodness is independent of God and the divine will. In order to adjudge God to be ‘perfectly good’, one must first know what ‘perfectly good’ denotes, “for clearly we could not judge anything to be *perfectly* good unless we could judge that it was good, and...our criterion must be at least logically independent of God” [Nielsen, 1982, p.340]. Following this reasoning, then, “we cannot base our morality on our conception of God” [Nielsen, 1982, p.342] because if one is to claim that God’s commands are good, one must already possess a moral criterion. Therefore, a divine command ethic which divorces “itself from natural law conceptions, breaks down because something’s being commanded cannot *eo ipso* make something good” [Nielsen, 1982, p.342]. Without any alternative criterion by which to recognise goodness, ‘good’ would simply be an alternative way of saying ‘that which God commands’. It would have no content of its own⁴⁷. If goodness does have substantive qualities, rather than simply being commanded by God, it could not be created simply by a command or by naming it so. Good is recognised because it embodies certain qualities, and therefore it follows that God could not make what is ‘bad’ ‘good’

⁴⁷ Indeed, this is what strong divine command theorists such as Brody and Geach allege.

simply by changing the label, for the instances in which goodness was previously known would still be regarded as good, despite the name change. A true change could only take place if human beings had no moral commitments and endorsed 'good' actions for no other reason than that God commanded them.

2.2.5. An Independent Moral Standard

Many theologians do not endorse the consequences of strong divine command theories, and they acknowledge the importance of human moral reasoning and of moral knowledge. Such theologians either dismiss divine command altogether or attempt to accommodate human reason within a weak divine command theory. For example, Quinn advances a means of verifying whether commands are really from God, insisting that "an autonomous moral agent can admit the existence of God if he is prepared to deny that any putative divine command which is inconsistent with his hard-core reflective moral judgements really is a divine command" [Quinn, 1981, p.53]. He asserts that God's commands must not go against human moral principles, therefore, while "genuine divine commands ought to be obeyed unconditionally...no directive which... (is)...not accept(able) on moral grounds is a genuine divine command" [Quinn, 1981, p.53]. According to Quinn's suggestion, divine commands are those which are in accord with human morality:

The theist need only be committed to obeying God's commands because they are necessarily morally legitimate themselves; he need not be committed to obeying such commands simply because they are the decrees of a superior power. [Quinn, 1981, p.55]

However, if we apply Quinn's ruling to the story of Abraham and Isaac, it would seem that the command which Abraham received to sacrifice Isaac was not from God at all. Quinn answers this objection, postulating that God is in a position to "appropriately compensate both the killer and his victim in the relevant felicific or beatific respects either here or hereafter" [Quinn, 1981, p.60]. Unfortunately, Quinn's answer does not provide an adequate resolution because it does not make the act moral according to human standards, therefore, using Quinn's rule, one would reject such a command. God may be able to compensate the

persons concerned, but this returns one to unquestioned obedience to God even when his commands are immoral. Such reasoning may offer hope that in the long run actions will not be immoral, but any place for human reasoning is lost and one is forced to accept what Quinn tried to avoid, namely, directives which do not appear to be morally legitimate.

Explanations such as Quinn's do not provide reasons to "deny that God's commands depend on an independent moral law" [Westmoreland, 1996, p.19]. Instead, they imply the existence of other moral criteria. For example, in the case of Abraham, Quinn believes the action God commands is and remains wrong. He does not argue that because it is commanded by God killing Isaac is right in itself⁴⁸, rather, he trusts in God's infinite wisdom and has faith that in the wider scheme of God's plan for the world – and because of the possibilities the afterlife affords – God can justify the act and compensate those concerned. In other words, divine command theorists, such as Quinn, are arguing that God has reasons for breaking the moral law, reasons which justify his actions. These musings imply that not the second but the first horn of the dilemma is accurate, for God has to justify his action according to a standard which is not simply what he wills. The logic of the argument is that "if God has compelling reasons for issuing the commands that he does...these reasons are what defines fundamental moral reality" [Johnson, 1994, p.48]. In speaking of God having reasons by which an immoral act is justified and made morally correct, the presumption is that because God has superior knowledge he knows that the act is really moral. Such an understanding subjects God to similar standards of value to those according to which human moral judgements are made and for which reasons must be given. The core conviction of such a position is that there is an independent moral reality to which even God must comply. Succinctly put:

This justification in terms of God's reasons for his commands suggests that ultimately it is those reasons, and not the fact that it is God who invokes them, which give the commands their normative force. Even though we are unaware of the reasons, we have faith that, if we did, we would recognise them as compelling moral reasons. [Westmoreland, 1996, p.20]

⁴⁸ Or more accurately the intention and willingness to kill Isaac.

Moreover, in the case of strong divine command theories which deny there is an independent moral standard, it is not only difficult to state meaningfully that God's commands are good, the very character of God is threatened. In particular, the statement that 'God is good' simply means that God conforms to his own moral law. This tautology goes to the heart of the nature of God and raises the question whether or not perfect goodness can be a meaningful attribute. In the stronger theory one cannot claim that moral attributes are necessary characteristics because God is "'free to command anything he chooses' including cruelty for its own sake...(which)...assumes that loving-kindness, justice, benevolence, etc. are *not* essential properties of God" [Talbot, 1982, p.201]. Such an outcome is anathema to those who contend that it is of the utmost importance that God is good and loving, insisting that "no analysis of Judeo-Christian ethical discourse can be regarded as adequate which does not provide for a sense in which the believer can seriously assert that God is good" [Adams, 1981a, p.100]. In order to state that God is good, in some real sense of the word, the postulation of an independent standard of morality is unavoidable.

To avoid this outcome that there is a moral standard to which even God must comply (and in an effort to escape the Euthyphro dilemma), Swinburne distinguishes between contingent and necessary moral truths⁴⁹. As a result of this division, he alleges that both horns of the Euthyphro dilemma are accounted for and morality is both substantively good and derived from the will of God. His argument runs thus:

The theist can happily take the first horn for actions which are contingently obligatory (i.e. for actions, the obligatoriness of which is a contingent moral truth), and the second horn for actions which are necessarily obligatory (i.e. for actions, the obligatoriness of which is a necessary moral truth). [Swinburne, 1981, p.124]

Accordingly, only contingent moral truths are explained using the divine command theory, whereas other values are held to be necessarily true irrespective of God's will and need to be explained in a different manner. Thus, Swinburne explicitly acknowledges the existence of

⁴⁹ "A contingent moral truth is one which holds only because the world is as it is in some further contingent respect. A necessary moral truth is one which holds however the world is in contingent respects" [Swinburne, 1981, p. 123].

an independent standard of moral value which determines some moral truths. Although God has the ability to command certain moral actions by his will, his power is limited as some moral truths are outside his control; the image one gets is that in the moral sphere God is the lieutenant and not the general. Swinburne acknowledges that God is constrained, but asserts that it is merely a logical constraint and therefore “is no more a restriction than it is a restriction on God that if he is to keep Jones a bachelor he must keep him an unmarried man” [Swinburne, 1981, p.125]. God remains powerful and “can do all things possible” [Pike, 1981, p.67], the only limitation is an apparent one in that he cannot do the logically impossible. However, it is not wholly apparent that it is logically impossible for God to have power over necessary as well as contingent moral truths. For example, if God wished to make what is ‘good’ ‘bad’, this is only logically impossible if moral value is determined independently of his will. If value were entirely dependent on divine fiat, there would be nothing contradictory in God choosing to make ‘good’ ‘bad’. Moreover, if God is constrained by what is logically possible then there is further conflict with regard to his attributes:

If God is both omnipotent and perfectly good, there are at least some consistently describable states of affairs that He both can and cannot bring about. There would thus appear to be a logical conflict in the claim that God is both omnipotent and perfectly good. [Pike, 1981, p.70]

Theologians such as Swinburne and Pike, among others, resolve this clash by concluding that though it is in God’s power to bring about evil states of affairs, “His nature or character is such as to provide material assurance that He will not act in this way” [Pike, 1981, p.81]. God’s character, which is “strongly disposed to perform only morally acceptable actions” [Pike, 1981, p.81], constrains his power and therefore it is God’s freely chosen decision to do good. The limitation of omnipotence by goodness is regarded as the only logical option because God cannot act either from ignorance or weakness of will. Swinburne draws his summation from an examination of human moral choice; an agent acts immorally either “because he does not fully recognise his duty, or because he is influenced by forces not subject to his control” [Swinburne, 1981, p.128], neither of which failings are possible for

God. However, such reasoning still is based on the assumption that good is independent of God, which is unavoidable if one wishes to assert that ‘God is good’ and mean something substantial.

2.2.6. Divine Command Theorist’s Response

The strong divine command theorist remains unconvinced by the above debate, rejecting any need for God to be morally good in human terms. Such theorists consider holding God accountable according to human reason both impudent and nonsensical; obedience, not understanding, is what is required. One should obey God’s commands “because of his status as creator, not because he has good reasons to command what he does...God made the world *ex nihilo*, and so has absolute property rights” [Westmoreland, 1996, p.20].

Divine command protagonists of this ilk introduce other premises which provide motives for obedience, in the light of which they adjudge moral objections to be immaterial. The addition of extra premises provides further considerations and reasons for obedience, and therefore such theories place the status of value as dependent on more than just the will of God. An example of such a theory is given by Brody who maintains that God should be obeyed because of his status as creator. Brody insists that “there is not, and never has been, such a thing as ownerless property” [Brody, 1981, p.146], and humans are the property of God and must obey him, for “if God, the creator, does wish us not to use the things of the world in certain ways, he will entail certain moral restrictions on property rights that might not be present otherwise” [Brody, 1981, p.146]⁵⁰. Therefore, morality originates only in part from God’s will, for “God’s wanting us to do (refrain from doing) A is not the whole part of the reason why the action is right (wrong); the additional part of the reason is that he is our creator to whom we owe obedience” [Brody, 1981, p.143]. A parallel argument is put forward by Geach, who proposes that one should obey God, not because he is creator, but because of his power, for “defiance of an Almighty God is insane: it is like trying to cheat a

⁵⁰ This is echoed by Swinburne, who in a like manner states that God as creator *ex nihilo* is the owner and, “the owner of property has the right to tell those to whom he has loaned it what they are allowed to do with it. Consequently, God has a right to lay down how that property...shall be used and by whom” [Swinburne, 1981, pp.132-133].

man to whom your whole business is mortgaged and who you know is well aware of your attempts to cheat him" [Geach, 1981, p.172]. These theories, then, are not pure divine command theories, because moral values derive not just from God's will but also rely upon secondary premises.

These versions of divine command theories ignore the moral difficulties noted above. They pass no comment on whether the commands of God are good. This reaction is unsurprising, for these theorists believe that one should obey God's commands as moral imperatives without question. In these schemas there is no other standard or conception of morality. In fact, whether or not God's commands are morally correct is not even an issue, for one should obey God for other reasons. According to such theories, all of God's commands are binding whatever they are; even malicious and cruel commands should be obeyed. This is an opinion which many would abhor, for the possibility that cruel acts could be morally required "is surely outrageous – not just false but obviously false – and any theory which has such implications obviously unacceptable" [Talbot, 1982, pp.202-203]. In addition, many query whether, in the absence of additional ethical content, God's commands can be called 'moral' at all, since, "God may require moral conduct from his followers. But he is unable to require them to substitute obedience to orders for morality while still calling it morality" [de Graaff, 1966, p.35]. Furthermore, in these arguments "the normative force of the principle requiring compliance to God's commands...is *presupposed* by his commands" [Westmoreland, 1996, p.20]. The reason for obeying is not the product of a command but is a prior or additional reason, and it is this extra factor which justifies obedience to subsequent commands. In these theories the obligation to obey God does not arise from God's will but from other considerations, and "the fact that the ultimate deontological moral norm that requires obedience to God is not a product of God's will is very damaging to...divine command theories" [Westmoreland, 1996, p.21].

Many are unconvinced by such claims, because although such arguments provide reasons to obey God, they do not answer the moral questions which are central to the pure divine command theory. The non-moral reasons which the above theorists cite for following God's

commands are not sufficient, because “these could not be such as to require our doing any action which was not judged on independent grounds to be morally right” [Young, 1981, p.157]. Nor do these theories fulfil theological claims about the character of God. In fact, they suggest a rather unsavoury character. Such arguments have even worked against religion because they have brought God as the source of moral authority into question. Many have decided that a God who can command anything and must still be obeyed is not worthy of worship, no matter what the consequences. For such a God “is not only the creator of all things, and the God of mercy, but also the God who countenances the everlasting torments of hell” [Streminger, 1989, pp.282-283]. A God who can do this and who “embodies discordant elements is no moral authority since moral authorities behave, at least, consistently” [Streminger, 1989, p.283]. Therefore, the strong theory which equates God and good is rejected by many as it destroys morality and fails to proffer any ‘good’ reasons to obey God’s commands.

2.2.7. No Moral Values without God

Furthermore, identifying morality with the commands of God assumes Karamazov’s dictate⁵¹ that “nothing is morally good or bad if there is no God” [Westmoreland, 1996, p.17]. Because the divine command theory commits one to the belief that there is no source of moral values except the will of God, there can be no morality outside a divine belief system. Therefore, those who do not believe in God can have no moral standards or knowledge, a position which makes living and communicating in a pluralistic society difficult to the point of being impossible. Moreover, such an understanding is not borne out by experience; people who do not believe in God and those who have different faiths do hold notions of value. The content of moral conceptions held by believers and non-believers do overlap, and “we seem capable of knowing that various actions are right or wrong without knowing what (or whether) God commands” [Westmoreland, 1996, p.19]. Such evidence points to the awareness that “rightness and wrongness seem independent of divine

⁵¹ Karamazov’s thesis being the view that “if there is no God, nothing is required, nothing is permitted and nothing is forbidden” [Quinn, 1978, p.35]; taken from Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, 1880.

commands" [Westmoreland, 1996, p.19]. Hence, the divine command theory actually undermines the project of moral realism because it makes moral knowledge and moral value available only to those who believe in God.

While it is the case in strong divine command theories that moral value can only be known by believers, others try to accommodate the possibility of valuing and knowing value by other means, and therefore postulate a weaker version of divine command. Quinn accepts the fact that people "can come to know, or at least to believe with reason, that certain things are morally forbidden without also knowing, or having a reasonable belief, that such things are contrary to God's commands" [Quinn, 1978, p.43]. Thus, it is possible to have moral knowledge without knowing God's commands. In his attempt to find a place for human reason, Quinn goes as far as to make the radical suggestion that "the sole epistemic access we have to God's will and what he has commanded is through moral inquiry of the usual sort" [Quinn, 1978, p.44]. Such a conception is highly problematic for a divine command theorist because it requires that human moral concepts are accurate and are known prior to God's commands. Adams takes a less extreme line and proposes that "in some ordinary (and...imprecise) sense of 'mean', what believers and non-believers mean by 'wrong' in ethical contexts may well be partly the same and partly different" [Adams, 1981a, p.103]. Yet even this more modest view cannot maintain that moral concepts can be known apart from knowledge of divine commands without postulating independent moral constructs.

Therefore, though divine command theorists can allow that there are concepts of wrong which are shared by non-believers, they cannot, without abandoning the divine command theory, accept that the secular individual's reasons for holding such values are correct. If actions are wrong because God forbids them, ultimately, no matter what methods are used to determine moral judgements, the reason why an action is wrong must be because God so commands. Therefore, the "social functions of a statement that something is (morally) 'wrong'" [Adams, 1981a, p.105] are the same in that "the emotional and volitional attitudes which believers and non-believers normally express in saying that something is 'wrong' are similar" [Adams, 1981a, p.106], but, and critically, for different reasons. Even the methods

of moral reasoning are different, for although both may take the same values into consideration, a believer would consider ethical musings as “an attempt to discover God’s will on the matter” [Adams, 1981a, p.91]. Thus, though there are similarities in the acts which believers and non-believers consider right and wrong, this is coincidental because of their dissimilar methods and reasons.

The divine command theory is by its nature limited to those who believe in God, and theorists are concerned only with the Judaeo-Christian tradition and sphere of influence. This is clearly seen in the work of Quinn who makes no bones about the fact that his theory is only for the theist, stating that his aim is to “make theological voluntarism a live option, at least, for philosophers who are committed to traditions of moral inquiry rooted in theistic starting points” [Quinn, 1990, p.346]. He believes that a moral theory limited to Christianity is viable, and that “the resurgence of fundamentalism...has made it clear that, at least in the short run, theism does not have to adapt itself to secular modernity to survive” [Quinn, 1990, p.346]. The ‘positive reasons’ (of Biblical evidence⁵² and divine sovereignty⁵³) he presents in favour of divine command “focus on beliefs we theists hold that are not shared with nontheists” [Quinn, 1990, p.354]. Nonetheless, despite such a claim, it is problematic for many to accept that divine command theories are correct because they limit morality to the Christian sphere.

⁵² He argues that “there can be no serious doubt that the Hebrew Bible portrays God as a commander or that He is to be obeyed” [Quinn, 1990, p.355]. In support of this viewpoint he cites examples from the Pentateuch, where divine commands are recorded, and God is essentially presented as a lawgiver. Such passages Quinn contends “invite...development along just the lines proposed by divine command theories” [Quinn, 1990, p.355]. This view is further supported by the texts of Genesis 22: 1-2, Exodus 11:2 and Hosea 1:2 and 3:1, where “God has apparently commanded homicide, theft and adultery, or at least fornication” [Quinn, 1990, p.355]. By a command God is able to make these actions correct, therefore “divine commands can determine the moral statuses of actions” [Quinn, 1990, p.357].

⁵³ Quinn uses the work of Thomas Morris to argue that because of divine sovereignty, necessary truths depend on God, i.e. “murder, theft and adultery are wrong...because God strongly believes that murder, theft and adultery are wrong” [Quinn, 1990, p.360], i.e. “the facts stand as they do because God has the beliefs God does” [Quinn, 1990, p.360]. This thesis Quinn feels works as long as the scope of the theory is restricted to avoid situations such as “God exists because God believes that God exists” [Quinn, 1990, p.361].

2.2.8. Consequences of Divine Command Theories

These many questions highlight the attendant problems of strong divine command theories. Moreover, despite Swinburne's claim that "whatever difficulties threaten the coherence of theism, the *Euthyphro* dilemma is not among them" [Swinburne, 1981, p.134], and Quinn's confidence that the dilemma "would not perturb anyone who held one of our divine command theories" [Quinn, 1978, p.46], the *Euthyphro* still creates difficulties. The challenge of the *Euthyphro* is that it throws into stark relief the problems of perceiving value as dependent on divine will, and thereby introduces the possibility of an independent moral standard. Assuming one wishes to make moral claims about the character and commands of God, as most believers do, then it seems unavoidable that one must adopt an independent standard of goodness which is, at least in part, not dependent on the will of God.

The challenge to maintain a divine command theory, while accepting the need of at least some independent valuations, is taken up by Adams, who presents a "*modified* divine command theory" [Adams, 1981a, p.83]. Adams' theory is characterised as a 'weak' theory because he does not assert that God could command anything he wished, for morality is only partially dependent upon God's will. For example, God could not make it morally correct, even if he commanded it, for Smith to torture a child. Not only does Adams reject the claim that God could arbitrarily command wrong actions, but he also denies that the meaning of the word 'wrong' in ethical contexts is exhausted by the claim that wrong means contrary to the commands of God. For Adams, like Swinburne and Pike, God is constrained by his character, notably by the fact that he is a loving God who loves his creatures. Following from this, Adams concludes that if God did command cruelty then it would be morally correct to disobey God. Adams states the tenets of his position thus:

I have assumed that it would be logically possible for God to command cruelty for its own sake. And I have rejected the view that if God commanded cruelty for its own sake, it would be wrong not to obey. It seems to follow that I am committed to the view that in certain logically possible circumstances it would not be wrong to disobey God. This position seems to be inconsistent with the theory that 'wrong' means 'contrary to God's commands'. [Adams, 1981a, p.86]

As Adams notes, constraining God's will by his loving character is incompatible with a divine command theory, and this recognition suggests that Adams has taken the first option of the Euthyphro dilemma. The implication is that actions are correct because they are loving, not because God commands loving actions. Thus, love, which for Adams is God's central characteristic, provides the moral standard rather than the wishes of a divine will. For Adams, moral values are derived from the commands of God only if his initial assumption – that God has the character he believes him to have – is correct. If this premise is contradicted, then his theory falls, for, “if God were really to command us to make cruelty our goal, then He would not have that character of loving us, and I would not say it would be wrong to disobey him” [Adams, 1981a, p.86]. This conviction that God is subject to an ethical standard which even he cannot contravene places Adams “in danger of abandoning the divine command theory completely” [Adams, 1981a, p.86]. Adams' modified theory maintains, not that moral value arises directly from the will of God and that ‘x is wrong’ means that ‘x is contrary to the commands of God’, but rather, ‘x is wrong’ means that ‘x is contrary to the commands of a loving God’. Adams maintains that if the unthinkable happened and God commanded cruelty, then:

presumably there is not a *loving* God. If there is not a loving God then neither ‘X is ethically wrong’ nor ‘X is ethically permitted’ is true of any X...therefore, I could not (consistently) call any action ethically wrong or permitted if I believed that God commanded cruelty for its own sake. [Adams, 1981a, p.87]

Adams determines these conclusions to be compatible with divine command theory, arguing that the possibility of God commanding cruelty for its own sake is not part of the “Judeo-Christian ethical system as he understands it” [Adams, 1981a, p.88]. He stresses that for a Christian the divine command theory is not based on a belief in a characterless God, but on a personal and relational God. Therefore, for a Christian “to have *faith* in God is not just to believe that He exists, but also to trust in His love for mankind” [Adams, 1981a, p.88].

Nonetheless, despite the place of a loving God in the Judaeo-Christian tradition⁵⁴, the question remains as to whether or not Adams' modified theory is actually a divine command theory, however modified. Does it avoid the criticisms of the Euthyphro by presenting a new version of divine command or does it reject divine command theory altogether? In answer to this question, it is certainly true that for Adams value depends on more than the will of God, for "the modified divine command theory clearly conceives of believers as valuing some things independently of their relation to God's commands" [Adams, 1981a, p.93]. The valuing of things other than God's will suggests that Adams is abandoning divine command theory as we know it, a summation which appears to be supported by his rejection of cruel actions and elevation of loving actions, regardless of whether or not they originate from the will of God.

Adams attempts put his theory firmly back on the second horn of the Euthyphro dilemma and re-establish the divine command element in his theory. He describes valuations which precede divine commands as 'non-ethical valuations' which do not threaten the view that moral values derive from the will of God. He draws a distinction between value categories, protesting that "there can be valuations which do not imply or presuppose a judgement of ethical right or wrong. For instance, I may simply like something, or want something, or feel a revulsion at something" [Adams, 1981a, p.94]. Accordingly, Adams claims that those valuations which arise independently of God's commands are "not judgements of ethical right and wrong and do not themselves imply judgements of ethical right and wrong" [Adams, 1981a, p.94]. He illustrates his claim by suggesting that there are evaluations which provide reasons for adopting a divine command theory and which presuppose judgements of right and wrong, but do not themselves make such judgements. The examples he cites are reasons such as "'Because I am grateful to God for His love'; 'Because I find it the most satisfying form of ethical life'; 'Because there's got to be an objective moral law if life isn't to fall to pieces, and I can't understand what it would be if not the will of God'" [Adams, 1981a, p.94]. This sounds very much like a regression to the type of argument put forward

⁵⁴ This in itself is a debatable assumption; recall the God who sent the plagues on Egypt, who said 'Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated'.

by Brody and Geach, namely, that one should obey God's will because of additional considerations, rather than simply for moral reasons. This defence, as we saw above, does not eradicate the problems, and it ignores Adam's own starting point that what induces him to obey God is that he judges him to be loving; precisely a moral valuation. Adams seems to be in difficulty with this division of values into categories, especially in light of his own judgement that a cruel action is wrong, a judgement which he makes independently of God's commands and to which he would adhere even if God commanded otherwise. Yet, he recognises this tension and adjudges that:

it is not essential to a divine command theory of ethical wrongness to maintain that all valuing, or all value concepts, or even all moral concepts, depend on beliefs about God's commands. What is essential to such a theory is to maintain that when a believer says something is (ethically) *wrong*, at least part of what he means is that the action in question is contrary to God's will or commands. [Adams, 1981a, pp.96-97]

Thus, Adams is presenting a theory in which the believer is not "committed to doing the will of God *just* because it is the will of God; he is committed to doing it partly because of other things which he values independently" [Adams, 1981a, p.97]. Adams is willing to accept this plurality of motives and that some things may be valued independently, and potentially override the commands of God. However, Adams does not provide criteria for how the distinction in valuations can be drawn, and, as Young points out, "it seems pertinent to ask just what kind of values Adams takes his 'independent valuations' to be, given the possibility that they may be used to override moral judgements (even those believed to be commanded by God)" [Young, 1981, p.161]. Furthermore, other problems are raised, such as where values which do not arise from God originate and what their relationship is to divine command values. Answering these dilemmas would reveal whether Adams has succeeded in creating a modified divine command theory or whether his efforts have simply served to more clearly emphasise the dilemma of the Euthyphro and the need for an independent moral standard.

At the last it seems that Adams, however reluctantly, has shown that an independent concept of morality is unavoidable. Unless it is the case that Adams believes in a moral reality by which even God must be judged, then his assertion that his theory would break down if God commanded cruelty makes no sense. If morality does originate from divine commands, then surely “the proper response then for someone like Adams to God’s commanding cruelty for its own sake...would be either that God had temporarily forsaken his other qualities (omniscience, etc.) *or* that he (the believer) had previously had a mistaken conception of the morally right as excluding cruelty for its own sake” [Young, 1981, p.163]. Adams does not do this but relies on moral concepts of loving actions with reference to which he judges the character of God.

2.2.9. Summary

Thus, it seems that divine command theories are doomed to failure, as an independent understanding of goodness is necessary not only in order for the individual to be able to recognise the goodness of any commands, but also in order to make claims about the nature and attributes of God. Modern followers of divine command (most notably Quinn and Adams) have not been able successfully to counter previous criticisms, and the force of the Euthyphro still remains. Despite the efforts of modern advocates of the theory, none of them has been “able to slip between the horns of the dilemma ...or successfully to grasp it by the horns” [Westmoreland, 1996, p.16]. There are other theories that the theist can adopt⁵⁵ which induce the believer to follow divine commands, but these are only ethical theories by default, and do not answer many of the issues raised. Consequently, a divine command theory does not support a realist conception of morality, for although moral values are real they are dependent on the commands of God which could be changed in an instant. By way of contrast, a true moral realism must assert the reality and certainty of moral values for all. Hence, moral realism cannot derive support from divine command theories; in fact the opposite is the case.

⁵⁵ i.e. those of Brody and Geach which provide secondary reasons for adopting divine command.

2.3. A Question of Dependence

The long prominence of divine command theories and the perception that moral values arise from divine will has resulted in a general conception, often unquestioned, that morality is dependent on religion. At its most stringent this view is exemplified by Karamazov's thesis⁵⁶, which posits that without a belief in God all is permitted and moral values cease to exist. Thus, rather than supporting moral realism such views threaten a realist conception in which moral values are indisputably part of reality for all human beings. Conversely, according to the divine command thesis moral value is changeable and dependent upon the will of God for its nature and authority. Such theories may have upheld moral realism in an idealised Christendom in which everyone supposedly believed in the same all-powerful God, but in a multi-faith, secularised context such a view is positively dangerous for moral value. In response to this moral crisis one can either accept divine command views and thus set about forcibly evangelising as the only way to preserve moral value, or alternatively assert that morality is independent of religion and pursue a moral realism⁵⁷. Frankena states the problem thus:

For to insist on this...(that morality is dependent on religion)...is to introduce into the foundations of any morality whatsoever all of the difficulties involved in the adjudication of religious controversies, and to do so is hardly to encourage hope that mankind can reach...some desirable kind of agreement on moral and political principles. It also encourages ethical and political scepticism in those who do not or cannot accept the required religious beliefs. [Frankena, 1981, p.30]

⁵⁶ It is important to note that Karamazov's theorem assumes a divine command theory. If other models of religion's relationship with morality are adopted then this would not necessarily be the case. For example, it could be the case that there is a creator God who created moral value as part of the fabric of the way that entities interrelate. If this were the case then the entities would be forced to act morally. In such a scenario morality would continue to be necessary even if God disappeared. Alternatively, morality could be connected but not dependent on God, in which case it would survive if there was no God.

⁵⁷ The third option of course is to deny that there are any values, and reject all morality – a course which is deemed in this study to be reductionist and not supported by moral phenomenology.

2.3.1. Morality not Dependent on Religion

The issue of whether moral values are dependent on religion has been highlighted as Western society has become secularised, and many who do not hold religious beliefs continue to profess moral convictions. Such situations, along with the problems of divine command theories, suggest that morality is independent of religion and has authority and status even when religion is rejected. However, denying the dependence of morality on religion does not mean that the two spheres are not connected in other ways. Addressing this issue is no easy task, as the demarcation line between what is moral and what is religious is unclear; undoubtedly religions contain moral codes and ideas. Yet, simply because morality and religion occur together does not mean that morality is dependent upon religion. There are many alternative conclusions, including the fact that moral value is independent of religion and finding them together is coincidental. It is possible to argue that moral values occur with religion simply because values and valuing are essential aspects of life, and therefore values will always be present in religious positions but certainly not dependent upon them. As MacLagan states:

We might plausibly conclude that while it may be true that we cannot have religion without morality this signifies no direct essential tie between the two, but is simply a special case of the general truth that we can have nothing in human life without morality, that the moral concern is inseparable from our human nature...the existence of a moral concern, however feeble in its energy and however perverse its forms, seems to be something we can take for granted. [MacLagan, 1961, p.18]

Some even argue that the evidence suggests not that “morality...presuppose[s] religion...(but that)...religion presupposes morality” [Nielsen, 1982, p.340]. The argument is that moral concepts, as we saw in the last section, are necessary in order for one to judge that God is good, therefore, “morality cannot be based on religion. If anything, the opposite is partly true” [Nielsen, 1966, p.148]. Hence, religion is dependent on morality, not morality on religion:

There is some moral understanding that is *logically independent* of belief in God and is necessary even to be able to understand the concept of God and that, God or no God, some actions can be

appreciated to be desirable and some as through and through evil and despicable. It is not true that if God is dead nothing matters. [Nielsen, 1982, p.336]

Therefore, as previously noted, the argument runs that moral valuation and judgement are a necessary part of human existence and essential to human reasoning and understanding. The contention is that moral evaluation and judgement are basic tools which cannot be destroyed or removed simply because of what a person does or does not believe; what one values may change, but valuing itself cannot cease. Therefore, moral judgement is part of the human condition and a prerequisite for understanding God. Such a position is endorsed by Hepburn in his declaration that:

Valuing is a process logically independent of describing: the sceptic will *describe* his world differently from the Christian, but that does not entail that he should *evaluate* the human world differently. Had there been a divine blue print of the good life for men, men themselves would have had to endorse *it*, hold *it* in esteem (or reject it, should it have been a bad one), before making its evaluations their own in a moral fashion. If there is no blue print and no God, they are not precluded from endorsing a scheme of values which still accords dignity to mankind in general and to certain kinds of human activity in particular. [Hepburn, 1958, p.149]

There are additional reasons for denying the logical dependence of morality on religion. In particular, the insistence that moral values are logically dependent on religion breaks Hume's golden rule that there can be 'no ought from is'. In claiming that ethical values originate from religious belief, the believer is drawing an evaluative conclusion from factual premises; "deriving an ethical conclusion logically from premises that are not ethical" [Frankena, 1981, p.20]. Frankena illustrates the process thus:

- (a) We ought to obey and worship God.
- (b) He commands us to worship him by keeping the sacraments.
- (c) Therefore, we ought to keep the sacraments. [Frankena, 1981, p.22]

The injunction (c) depends on theological premises, such as God exists, a factual premise. The factual nature of the premise (a) Frankena argues is not altered by the inclusion of the

imperative term 'ought', because implicit in the premise is the factual notion that God exists and that if God exists he should be worshipped. The logical link between the premise and the conclusion Frankena argues cannot be maintained. Consequently, he proposes that "if one wishes to maintain that the justification of any and every ethical principle depends on an appeal to premises of a theistic kind, then one must hold that this is so, not in a strict logical sense, but in some other" [Frankena, 1981, p.23]. Frankena stands by his statement even against the position that all ethical standards can only be known by revelation. Even if this were so he insists that "it does not follow that these new ethical principles logically require any theological premises for their justification. Though revealed, they may still be logically independent of all non-ethical propositions, even theological ones" [Frankena, 1981, p.26]. He concludes his exploration of this topic with the assertion that "none of the claims involved in the thesis that morality is logically dependent on religion can be regarded as established" [Frankena, 1981, p.30], because as Nielsen confirms, "if a religious utterance is not a moral utterance no moral inferences can be derived from it" [Nielsen, 1966, p.144]. Frankena, does not deny that religion and morality are connected in other ways, i.e. that religion provides "dynamics, motivation, inspiration, or vision" [Frankena, 1981, p.31]. Clearly he would be wrong to reject all dependence of morality on religion and no one, secular or religious, would deny that for many people at many times and places moral belief systems have arisen from religious systems and that religious conviction has provided the individual's primary motive for moral action. No one is denying that morality can be dependent on religion, but rather asking whether it must be; the question is whether "morality can exist or thrive apart from religion" [Maclagan, 1961, p.18].

Moreover, there are other reasons for asserting that if there is any dependency it is that religion is dependent on morality and not the other way around. Not only is a moral understanding necessary to know that God is good, but as Maclagan notes above⁵⁸, every religion includes a moral standpoint and usually a moral code; in no tradition can religion be found without moral content, whereas, morality can survive alone in a secular context.

⁵⁸ See Section 2.3.

According to such reasoning, one could argue that religion is merely the superficial (and even superstitious) gloss which has been added to the moral core in order to account for the experience of moral authority.

2.3.2. Morality Dependent on Religion

By contrast, those who believe that morality is dependent on religion take this line not just because they may adhere to a divine command thesis, but because they maintain that without the authority that religion gives to morality the compulsion to act morally ceases. Without the promise of justification for moral acts – such as rewards in heaven or punishment for wrongdoing – they submit that there is no reason to live a moral life. Hence, like Karamazov they do not believe that moral values are real and have authority in and of themselves, but only by virtue of their connection to religion. This supposed dependence of morality on religion has been asserted by non-believers as well as believers, and some theorists – and not just religious ones – have contended that society as a whole should endorse a religious world-view for the sake of preserving morality in order to ensure the smooth running of society. Notable amongst those who express such opinions are sociologists, such as those whom Nielsen cites, who maintain that “whatever intellectual impediments we have to belief in God, such a religious belief is morally necessary. Without it we can hardly have a rooted moral belief-system, and without that, as social theorists such as Durkheim and Bell have stressed, we cannot have a stable, well-ordered society” [Nielsen, 1982, p.336]. Those who argue from this point of view believe that a religious answer is the only positive answer to the question ‘Why should I be moral?’. Others, such as the realists of the first chapter, deny such a premise and maintain that being moral is a natural part of human life and independent of a religious framework.

The attempt to find a “rational justification for the individual’s acceptance of the unconditional claim...of an objective morality” [Bishop, 1985, p.3] has troubled philosophers since Glaucon told the story of Gyges’ ring in Plato’s *Republic*. Socrates argued that behaving immorally, even if it was certain that no one would ever find out,

would be damaging to one's character. However, many find this an inadequate response and profess that religious answers are more satisfying because they provide total and certain solutions. This argument Bishop calls the "the Rational Motivation Argument...(which requires)...theism as part of the rational basis for accepting any objective morality" [Bishop, 1985, p.9]. In essence, this is a form of ethical egoism which is based on the premise that agents act from self-interest and religion ensures that moral action is in the agent's interest. Good behaviour is required because the Christian notion of "a commonwealth of love" [Bishop, 1985, p.7] entails that "no individual can, in fact, achieve his own ultimate happiness at the expense of others" [Bishop, 1985, p.7]. Therefore, Christian morality guarantees that even if immoral actions go undetected, one's own interests are never served by adversely affecting the interests of others. An alternative religious answer to the question 'Why be moral?' is put forward by Steuer, who argues that "moral activity, consists of what may well be described as respect for persons – whether those persons are other people in our environment, ourselves, or (even) God" [Steuer, 1982, p.160]. He alleges that respect for persons as the primary moral concept can only be enforced if it is put in theological terms of persons being made in the image of God⁵⁹. Like Bishop, he finds no non-religious reason to be moral, as "non-theistic moralists seem hard-pressed to provide even a sufficient reason for the moral enterprise" [Steuer, 1982, p.163]. These two theories provide examples of why many maintain that "the moral enterprise rests or depends upon a religious foundation...that religion serves as an anchor rather than as an albatross for morality" [Steuer, 1982, pp.157-158].

2.4. The Humanist Critique

Others categorically deny that religion is necessary to maintain moral value in society and, like Nielsen, protest that "such an apologetic claim has not been sustained" [Nielsen, 1982, p.336]⁶⁰. In fact, it could be argued that religious reasons for acting morally are selfish and

⁵⁹ One obvious objection to this is to apply a version of the Euthyphro and ask "are persons worthy of respect because they are created by God, or did God create persons because they are worthy of respect" [Hammond, 1985, p.25].

⁶⁰ The claim being that religion is needed to maintain moral value.

therefore non-moral⁶¹. Hence, religion actually encourages immorality because religion denies that moral value is a human capacity which is common to all and reduces it to obedience to the decrees of an almighty being.

2.4.1. Continuation of Value

In contrast, humanists assert that human beings are essentially moral beings and that the ability to perceive value and make moral judgements is simply part of the human condition. Moreover, they maintain that moral choice always and ultimately comes down to the individual. Whether or not there is a God does not affect humanity's need to make moral decisions: "No amount of theological statements of fact can relieve men of the need to decide morally for themselves. What obligations we have, therefore, cannot be 'undermined' by God's non-existence" [Hepburn, 1958, p.134]. The process of moral decision-making is concerned with the meaning and value of human life; it is about one's sense of identity as an individual and within a social group. Value is bound up with answering the question "What life is most satisfactory to me as a whole?" [Nowell-Smith, 1966, p.108]. In making judgements and conforming to or admiring certain moral norms and ideals, a person is making a commitment to a certain way of life and valuing certain things above others; judging what is important and worthwhile, and living accordingly. Moral choices cannot be avoided as they provide order and patterns to existence, something which humans cannot live without. One can make the moral choice to adopt a religious code or to aspire to a religious ideal. However, as humanists protest, this is not the only way to live morally, nor is moral value threatened when belief in God is rejected. As Hepburn states:

Transition from belief to unbelief does not 'undermine' moral obligations, unless obligations are binding only if the good life is completely attainable. But in fact morality makes the same demands *whether or not* our ideals can be completely realised. Lying, stealing, or murdering is no whit more or less reprehensible if men are mortals or immortals, whether their way of life is to last a generation or all eternity. [Hepburn, 1958, p.134]

⁶¹ A contention which arguments like Bishop's support. See Section 2.3.2.

The central place of value in human life does not (or need not) diminish if belief in God is relinquished. Hepburn elucidates this protest against those who maintain that morality is dependent on religion:

‘Why should I esteem this act of heroism, self-sacrifice, devotion any the less, although there exists no God, or deny dignity to beings capable of the things men are capable of?’ No logical blunders are being committed if I say that dignity can be accorded to men on account of their freedom to pattern their own unrepeatable lives, on account of their courage in the face of their finitude, the reality of death, and their capacity for living the moral life and the aesthetically creative life. [Hepburn, 1958, pp.149-150]

Religious believers may counter that though some moral awareness is possible without religious commitment, and life can have some meaning, there is no unity of meaning, no ultimate purpose. Therefore, they assert that “only a God-centred and perhaps only a Christ-centred morality could meet our deepest and most persistent moral demands” [Nielsen, 1982, p.346]. This charge a humanist will not contradict, believing that “meaning is *given* to life by individuals, not *discovered*. There is no single setting of life that grants meaningfulness, while all others take it away” [Hepburn, 1958, p.152]. The humanist accepts that there is no overriding purpose which is akin to religious meaning, a conclusion which they consider is not a failing but a recognition of the reality of the situation. Many maintain that the unity given by religion is the product of wishful thinking. Nielsen, for example, accounts for such wishes, postulating that because of the:

long period of infancy, there develops in us a deep psychological need for an all protecting father; we thirst for such security, but there is not the slightest reason to think that there is *such* security. Moreover, that people have feelings of dependence does not mean that there is something on which they can depend. [Nielsen, 1982, p.347]

The apparent unity of meaning and purpose religion offers Nielsen regards as delusional, and he argues that a lack of unity does not mean that “there is no purpose *in* life – that there is no way of living that is ultimately satisfying and significant” [Nielsen, 1982, p.347]. Moreover, the unity provided by religion may not only be false but also potentially

corrupting, because religious conformity prevents the agent from being fully autonomous. Thus, the humanist claim is not only that morality can be independent of religion, but that morality must be independent in order for humans to be full moral agents. The assumption is that only the secular moralist can act morally simply for the sake of morality with no ulterior motives or hidden agendas, and because the humanist believes in no higher authority, the full responsibility for moral action falls entirely on the agent. Responsibility brings with it freedom, and only if morality is independent of religion are we free to choose. Thus, Nielsen argues that “we do not need a God to *give* meaning to our lives by making us for his sovereign purpose and perhaps thereby robbing us of our freedom” [Nielsen, 1982, p.347].

2.4.2. A Question of Autonomy

The belief in the autonomy of the moral agent is at the heart of humanist critiques of the effect religion has on morality. The notion of a moral agent as an individual, choosing, responsible being became paramount during the Enlightenment, and this stress on the choosing autonomous individual has continued to be prized in Western society, where freedom (freedom seeming to mean a lack of constraint, either externally or internally imposed) is sacrosanct.

Autonomy as a characteristic of identity and personhood is difficult to marry with religious conceptions of morality in which moral value is imposed by God, rather than being discovered or created by the agent. The incongruity of these two notions is brought into stark relief by the work of Rachels who contrasts the role of the moral agent and the worshipper. If one is a worshipper and believes in a creator God whom one must worship, then one adopts “a certain role...the role of a ‘Child of God’” [Rachels, 1981, p.40]. Rachels’ contention is that “in worshipping God one is acknowledging and accepting this role, and that this is the primary function of the ritual of worship” [Rachels, 1981, p.40]. In order for worship to be possible, the worshipper must humble himself before God, for “the worshipper necessarily assumes his own inferiority; and since inferiority is an asymmetrical relation, so is worship” [Rachels, 1981, p.40]. This humbling and necessary inferiority Rachels

perceives as the dominating feature of religious life. Therefore, the believer abdicates responsibility for his moral judgements and hands authority over to God in a contract which is exemplified in the story of Abraham and Isaac. Abraham ignored his own moral persuasions and submitted – as a child does to the will of God – even though the “temptation was to disobey God; God had ordered him to do something contrary to both his wishes and his sense of what would otherwise be right and wrong” [Rachels, 1981, p.42]. Thus, Abraham subordinated his own desires and judgements to God’s command even when God’s command was in conflict with his own moral convictions. Hence, Rachels argues that in the role of worshiper one recognises God as having an unqualified claim upon one’s obedience, a claim which is in direct contrast to one’s status as a moral agent. A moral agent is an “autonomous or self-directed agent” [Rachels, 1981, p.44], and as such any attempt to “deliver oneself over to a moral authority for directions about what to do is simply incompatible with being a moral agent” [Rachels, 1981, p.44]. His contrast of the two roles leads Rachels to claim that “God cannot exist, because no being could ever *be* a fitting object of worship”⁶² [Rachels, 1981, p.34]. For Rachels, autonomy is a primary non-negotiable human characteristic, and is important enough for him to believe that it extinguishes the possibility of belief in God.

The perception put forward by Rachels of believers as childlike and unable to take responsibility for their actions is a common one among humanists. Often religious morality is depicted as an inferior or lesser moral outlook. For example, for Nowell-Smith, religious morality is a middle stage on the way to a true moral understanding, and he uses Piaget’s model of childhood development to elaborate his conception of religion. Piaget’s model is taken from the game of marbles, and describes the different ways it is played by children of different ages. Piaget differentiates three key stages: the first and youngest age group play in a haphazard manner with no rules, the second and middle group have learnt rules and these rules are considered to be unbreakable edicts, and the third, the oldest group, use rules, but

⁶² His argument has three steps and runs thus: “(a) If any being is God, he must be a fitting object of worship. (b) No being could possibly be a fitting object of worship, since worship requires the abandonment of one’s role as an autonomous moral agent. (c) Therefore, there cannot be any being who is God” [Rachels, 1981, p.45]

for them rules are flexible and may be changed to suit the circumstances. Nowell-Smith equates the second level with religious morality, where deontology and heteronomy are the most important features, and the third stage as akin to the humanist autonomous moral conception.

Nowell-Smith regards religious morality as a necessary stage of human development, which corresponds to the stage in which a child must defer to the parent in order to learn for itself. However, the religious person, rather than passing through the childlike stage, carries this childish comprehension of morality into adulthood. Religious adherents thus remain stuck in a childish stage of moral understanding; rules are obeyed for their own sake, and acts endorsed not because they are thought to be right, but merely because God requires them. Nowell-Smith parallels the attitude of the Christian towards God to “the small child’s attitude towards his parents and the other authorities from whom he learns what it is right to do. In the first instance little Tommy learns that it is wrong to pull his sister’s hair, not because it hurts her, but because Mummy forbids it” [Nowell-Smith, 1966, p.104]. Like the small child who is impotent and fully dependent on the world of adults, so too is the Christian on God, for the “mystery of God’s ways to Man is the mystery of a father’s ways to his children” [Nowell-Smith, 1966, p.107]. Even the rewards and punishments of heaven and hell are comparable to the child’s experience of “salvation in the form of parental smiles and damnation in the form of parental frowns” [Nowell-Smith, 1966, p.107].

2.4.3. Religion undermines Moral Value

Nowell-Smith’s assessment of Christian morality lies at the centre of the humanist critique of religion. By reducing morality to simply the following of orders, the moral capacity of the individual is corrupted and morality is devalued and damaged. The believer does not act from moral reasons, such as wanting to help another person or to do good, but from selfish reasons, hoping for reward or in order to escape everlasting punishment. The only religious reasons one has for behaving morally are borne out of self-interest. These selfish reasons are, for the humanist, the death of morality because they stifle true moral feeling and action.

Moral qualities such as compassion, goodness and honour – qualities which provide the meaning and depth of life – are undervalued, and moral obligation is ignored unless it accords with religious dictates and can thus be interpreted as religious obligation. Streminger paraphrases Hume's argument that "religion creates an *artificial, affect[ed]* life, a life in which, for example, Sabbath-rules play a dominant role, or in which human flattery is activated without bounds" [Streminger, 1989, p.286]. Hume attests that a religious 'artificial' life destroys 'true' morality, which he holds to be essentially sympathy and compassion. Moral responses (considered 'natural' by Hume) are overridden by religious beliefs and thereby morality becomes nothing more than a means by which to serve and praise God. Religious devotion is regarded as the 'highest' morality, and 'true' moral values – those which place human beings at the centre of moral action – are disregarded. Thus, the 'higher' religious morality, consisting of acts such as fasting and praising God, is valued at the expense of 'natural' morality. As a result, acts that conflict with 'natural' moral sentiment are performed and justified. For example, immoral acts against those with different beliefs are sanctioned despite their inhumanity. At its most extreme, religious morality can become "rites, ceremonies, and, sometimes, oppression and annihilation of other people" [Streminger, 1989, p.290]. This humanist critique, that the effect of the religious "mechanism on the moral sentiments is fatal...(and that)...believers become obstinate and dogmatical" [Streminger, 1989, p.288], has maintained its force and gathered strength as knowledge of the atrocities past and present done in the name of religion have come to light.

2.4.4. Summary

The humanists put forward a powerful argument for the necessary independence of morality from religion. Yet, there are flaws in this critique, not least, that it is the worst case scenario which is being portrayed. For example, Rachels description of worship, while it might be how certain religious elements consider worship, it is by no means the majority view. Worship is far more complex than Rachels realises, and for the believer it performs many functions: from establishing a connection to God to an opportunity for reflection and rebirth. Therefore, Rachels can only contend that worship and autonomy are incompatible if one

adopts his very limited description of worship. However, there are many who do adhere to the religious beliefs that Nielsen, and Nowell-Smith criticise. For example, many believers accept with joy the term 'childlike', which Lucas assures us is not a pejorative word. They lack autonomy and responsibility (which the humanists see as so damaging to moral judgement) and willingly accept that "we need the Moral Law...because we are not adult enough to take our own decisions correctly" [Lucas, 1966, p.128]. Therefore, taking these points into account the humanist critique is still applicable to certain religious positions.

However, such beliefs while being accurate for some, cannot be claimed to represent the whole of the Christian or the religious position, and there are many who would fairly claim that the humanist critique either misrepresents or ignores their positions. There are many theologians who advocate a form of Christianity which they believe maintains the autonomy and responsibility of the moral agent. For example, de Graff agrees that "morality has no need of God the commander because morality has no place for commands given by one person to a moral agent" [de Graaff, 1966, p.35]. Such apologists allow the possibility that there is a moral understanding which does not come from God, and that human beings must make their own decisions. Even Adams, the advocate of a divine command thesis, insists, to the extent of threatening his own premises, that human beings value things other than God's will, and can be morally justified in disobeying God. In these ways theologians attempt to do justice to the humanist observation that "moral judgement cannot be so very untrustworthy if we are to depend upon it (as we must) in making that boldest of all judgements – 'God is morally perfect'" [Hepburn, 1958, p.139]. Instead, they look to other means of understanding moral value. De Graaff's solution, for example, is to take Jesus as a model for the moral life, and to try and act in the way he would have done. Such moral reasoning is religious, but it takes into account one's own values and does not sacrifice the individual's moral responsibility. Hence, it is possible to argue that if one rejects the divine command model (and Adams would say even without rejecting it) there are many ways in which autonomy can be maintained within a religious outlook. Such reasoning renders null and void critiques such as Rachels that work only with a divine command model in which

obedience is the only criterion for action. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to present a general criticism of the humanist attack upon religious morality, namely, that it only deals with one (and a stereotypical one at that) view of the nature of religion. If religion is considered in a broader manner, using different models of religion and morality, and their connections, then it may be that the humanist critique would largely evaporate.

Moreover, there are parts of the humanist critique which raise many questions. For example, the assertion that the autonomous individual rules out the possibility of religion is partisan to say the least. There are many non-religious scholars who do not believe in God and nonetheless dismiss the possibility of autonomy for human beings. Hence, insisting on the autonomy of the moral agent is not enough of a reason for dismissing religion out of hand, although it may prevent individual belief. Furthermore, the humanist critique has presented the debate as though there were only two options, either total heteronomy or total autonomy; they portray religious morality as enforced moral choices and humanist morality as autonomous moral choices. Such starkness is highlighted by the way in which both Hepburn and Nielsen⁶³ describe 'meaning' as 'given to life' by individuals rather than discovered. As we saw in the last chapter these are certainly not the only options. Moral realists without religious convictions would insist that meaning, assuming that moral values are at least part of where an individual derives meaning from, is in fact discovered. Many humanists, one would speculate, would agree that the moral order is a determining factor, and hence the sphere of autonomy is again reduced in that if moral values are 'real' one is restricted by these values for one does not have total freedom to invent different moral values. A moral standard is indeed implied by much humanist discourse, for example the insistence that one should be moral for the sake of morality necessitates that there are moral values. None of the theorists discussed in this chapter have advocated an 'anything goes' policy, such as Karamazov's. In fact much of the motivation has been to preserve morality from the 'threat' of religion. However, in their eagerness to dismiss religious morality, some of these factors have been (perhaps only momentarily) overlooked.

⁶³ See Section 2.4.1.

2.5. Alternative Connections

This criticism leads one to consider whether other models may provide a better means of conceptualising the relationship between religion and morality. Thus far the focus has been upon two sides of what is in effect one way of conceiving of the relationship between morality and religion. One side unequivocally holds that morality is dependent upon religion, and the other insists, just as determinedly, that morality is independent of religion. This concept of dependency, particularly as it appears in divine command theory, limits understandings of both religion and morality. Throughout this discussion it is true to say that both secular and religious commentators have portrayed morality as being primarily about rules or individual acts. It has been an underlying assumption that morality is about finding the right answer to a problem: “that in any given situation there is some specific act which *ought* to be done” [Oppenheimer, 1966, p.220].

The focus of this chapter has been upon these models, a course which is justified given that this is the dominant way moral values are conceived and by which means moral realism has been upheld by religion. Such conceptions occur not only within the philosophical and theological worlds, but often the mention of morality to the ordinary person conjures up a list of ‘thou shalt not’s’ and a concern for doing the ‘right thing’. However, this is a very narrow view of morality and if it is discarded, or revised, then moral value and the human response to it can be liberated and understood in a more fulfilling and creative way. Furthermore, a change in our understanding of moral values allows for new possibilities in the relationship between morality and religion (religion no less than morality has suffered from being portrayed in a narrow manner).

There are many other ways in which people approach morality, and “very different models are quite often in fact held by morally sensitive people – by those, for instance, who see moral endeavour as the realising of a pattern of life or the following out of a pilgrimage” [Hepburn, 1966, p.181]. Both theology and philosophy have traditions which present morality not as answering particular problems, or doing the right thing, but as a more holistic

enterprise. Both inside and outside the Christian tradition there are examples of individuals and even communities who have adopted far broader understandings of morality. There are various models to which one can look for alternatives: such as following an ideal or the example of a holy person. Another suggestion is to look towards art and the artist, and thereby to “escape...from the tyranny of assured results and see morality from a different point of view, as an art rather than as a science” [Oppenheimer, 1966, p.221]. In this move, “the model of the computer is replaced by the model of the painter engaged upon his masterpiece” [Oppenheimer, 1966, p.221]. The model of the artist has the advantage of incorporating the element of creativity and introducing the idea that part of the moral process is creative. In deciding what judgements to make and in raising certain values over others, one is involved in the process of (re)creating oneself. Morality seen in this manner is not just about the question “‘what shall I do?’ but also to those very embarrassing questions – ‘what does my life add up to?’ ‘what is meaning?’” [Hepburn, 1966, pp.181-182].⁶⁴ Such models present morality not as a compartmentalised part of life which is important in specific situations, but as fundamental to all areas of life and to the kind of person one is. This broad conception is seen by some as introducing a religious element – and indeed for some religion holds the answers – but such issues can also be seen as purely moral. Issues about what is the meaning and purpose of life are questions which are often thought of as religious, thus, it seems that morality can function in a similar way to religion. The moral quest and creative process may even be part of what provides the meaning and content of religious beliefs. Perhaps it is this overlap and uncertainty of where the religious ends and the moral begins that has made discussion in this area so complex.

One example of a richer model of moral value and its relationship to religion is set out by W. G. Maclagan. Maclagan rejects any dependency of morality on religion, arguing that what “we mean by authority in morals cannot be stated in terms of power, even if the power be cosmic” [Maclagan, 1961, p.91]. In fact, for Maclagan, not only is moral authority not about power, but to portray it in this way is destructive for morality. Hence, Maclagan is highly

⁶⁴ The issue of art and its relationship to morality will be returned to in the next chapter.

critical of divine command theories, maintaining that any hint of reward debases morality – as noted in the humanist critique – and fails to understand the nature of moral value. He argues that morality is authoritative because of its content, not by virtue of its author; “it is this authoritativeness of the content, without regard to the question ‘*Who* says so?’ that is the mark of the morally binding as contrasted with the positively commanded” [MacLagan, 1961, p.72]. He maintains that the belief that morality is derived from the commands of God does not come from any experience of morality, but has “been vitiated by infection from beliefs at which they...(i.e. religious believers)...have arrived by a quite different route” [MacLagan, 1961, p.75]. Thus, he surmises that “moral demand neither needs nor abides extraneous support...It must be left to stand on its own, to make sense of itself” [MacLagan, 1961, p.64].

MacLagan contends that moral value is objective and absolute, a thesis which he supports from experience, especially the experience of duty. Duty, he maintains, is what characterises the moral experience (whether we choose to respect or ignore duties in practice), and though he grants that there are other aspects to morality, he regards duty as the most important; the ‘spinal column’ of the moral life. Thus, he declares that “morality itself is misunderstood by any who do not recognise that the concept of duty is cardinal in the interpretation of it” [MacLagan, 1961, p.51]⁶⁵. Duty is the feeling that one is required to act in a certain way, and the moral requirement is distinctive in that it feels absolute⁶⁶. The ‘absolute’ quality of moral demand is an essential aspect of morality, and if the individual “once lost the sense of this ‘absolutely’ his consciousness...would thereby cease to be a *moral* consciousness altogether” [MacLagan, 1961, p.53]. Therefore, in the experience of duty one encounters “moral demand...(which)...comes to us in the form of a duty consciousness that imposes an absolute claim on our lives” [MacLagan, 1961, p.53]. Such experience suggests that values are real and objective. Thus, MacLagan is a realist, believing that values are discovered, not invented. About this issue he is emphatic, stating that “it is as absurd and incomprehensible

⁶⁵ Although it must be understood that duty for MacLagan is not the repressive, dour, bleak way of life that critics often portray, made plain by his statement that “I am misunderstood if my saying this is taken to signify that I think of the morally good man as one in whose ears the ‘Voice of Duty’ is continually sounding and whose life has the sourness of aspect that this painful consciousness would naturally generate” [MacLagan, 1961, p.51].

⁶⁶ This is equivalent to moral authority as outlined in Chapter One, and which is a primary argument in support of the realist cause.

to talk of 'inventing a *value*' as it is to talk of 'inventing a moral truth'" [MacLagan, 1961, p.87]. He suggests that awareness of moral values comes from reflecting upon instances, yet when one speaks of values, something other than the instances in which they are perceived is meant. Accordingly, although values are recognised in particular instances, they "are not themselves qualities (of acts or situations) even though they are the condition of our ability to use language about acts and situations that suggests that that is precisely what they are" [MacLagan, 1961, p.92]. Thus values are more than qualities of particular instances, and can "quite properly be thought of as self-supporting" [MacLagan, 1961, p.84] and should "be conceived as somehow substantial in their very being as values" [MacLagan, 1961, p.89]. The values which are inferred from instances, then, do not need any external support; it is simply the case that "the order of values lies, so to say, behind all value-*qualities*; but we can specify nothing that lies behind it in its turn" [MacLagan, 1961, p.92]. This concept of values is not an easy one to grasp, and MacLagan himself accepts that it is obscure and problematic. However, he believes that it cannot be dispensed with, concluding that experience teaches of the existence of self-supporting and objective values.

Having categorically denied the dependence of morality on religion, he reintroduces potential ways in which religion and morality could be connected. MacLagan suggests that genuine moral experience "may be such that we cannot adequately and convincingly describe it except in language of a religious character" [MacLagan, 1961, p.93]. Furthermore, he contends that genuine morality is religious in quality as it is not "uncritically accepting but reflectively approving its code, and drawing strength from a personal recognition of absolute obligation" [MacLagan, 1961, p.183]. MacLagan postulates that if morality is so conceived and "only if, it is accepted in this way the moral experience may then reveal itself as more than it is ordinarily acknowledged to be, as having a character such that in, and not by any transcendence of, its nature as moral it is also religious" [MacLagan, 1961, p.64]. Such an assertion, he maintains, does not change his concept of duty, or of moral value, but "belongs properly to moral experience in its nature as moral...it is simply to say that the moral consciousness itself is, as such, already a mode of religious consciousness"

[MacLagan, 1961, p.94]. Thus, once questions of dependence are dismissed, the possibility of a different kind of relationship emerges. Morality, while independent of religion and religious support, does relate to religion; it shares, at its highest, a religious characteristic and mode of enactment. Thus, “though we may have banished theology from our account of the moral response...we may have to retain it in our account of the fully adequate, the spiritually perfect response, precisely because the perfect response goes beyond morality” [MacLagan, 1961, p.131]. Therefore, MacLagan claims that morality is independent of religion, but that true morality is religious in character and religious faith can enhance the quality of moral commitment. In sum, MacLagan’s thesis is that:

Genuine morality...can be independent of religion, if religion is here understood to mean something other than and, as it were, extraneously supporting the attitude of moral commitment. On the other hand there is good sense in saying that genuine moral commitment is itself religious in quality whether or not a man so describes it in his own case. And when we look at the matter in this way we shall say that morality is *not* possible without religion. [MacLagan, 1961, p.183]

For MacLagan, then, the religious and the moral are (or can be) separate, and must not be thought of as dependent; “the view that morality cannot exist or sustain itself apart from religion will actually tend to the debasement of both, the replacement of the real thing by the inferior substitute” [MacLagan, 1961, p.186]. However, if the pitfalls of misconceiving of both morality and religion are avoided, and they are presented in their fullest sense, then, and only then, a relationship is formed which is enriching for both. In such a case genuine morality is religious in character, and religion is enriched by acknowledging the nature of genuine morality. MacLagan’s assertion is that religion and morality, properly conceived, are supportive of each other, and to properly grasp the nature of morality one has to move into areas which have formerly been a religious preserve. At the last he prescribes that:

What is needed is a continuing conviction of morality’s independence of religion save in the sense in which religion is just the fully moral attitude itself, and of the primacy of its authority over any authority that may be claimed by religion otherwise conceived. [MacLagan, 1961, p.188]

The work of MacLagan presents a very different picture of the nature of morality, religion and the relationship between the two. He makes criticisms of 'inferior' religious morality, which are similar to those of the humanists. Yet, notwithstanding his criticisms he proceeds to explore the nature of both morality and religion in order to find alternative permutations of the relationship. Hence, MacLagan offers an explicitly realist thesis – which is often missing from humanist accounts – in which the authority and status of moral value is retained, again showing that middle ground is possible. However, there are obvious elements of MacLagan's thesis which need to be examined, such as exactly how morality can be objective and absolute, and indeed this is part of the remit of this thesis. What MacLagan's work has shown is that if a moral realism can be established, then there are connections between morality and religion which can be maintained to the benefit of both. In particular MacLagan has brought to light the fact that a religious element may be an important part of a full conception of moral value (or of the human response to moral value). These are issues which will continue to be examined as this thesis progresses.

2.6. Conclusion

Reviewing what has been learnt about the nature of moral value in this chapter, it seems that the traditional way of upholding moral realism – that of relying on the authority of religion – is unsatisfactory. Making moral value dependent upon religion in fact does not support a realist conception in which moral values are absolute, for revealed values, such as those adopted in the divine command thesis, are relative to divine whims. Such a conception actually undermines the realist conception of moral value, and furthermore makes communication between those of differing religious persuasions (or none) fraught with difficulty. The divine command theory offers a framework which has no common moral conceptions; unless one wishes to endorse the conversion of all. Moreover, the questions raised in the humanist critique support the conclusion that a thesis which makes moral value dependent upon religion must be neglected. All of this points to a conception of morality which is independent of religion and which presents moral value as part of the human condition. However, denying that moral value is *dependent* on religion should not

automatically lead to the adoption of the opposite view, that moral value is invented and there is no place for religion in the moral sphere. While it may be true that religion in its 'childish' form is always detrimental to moral understandings, there are many other more sophisticated forms of religious belief which may positively support moral conceptions and endeavours. The work of MacLagan offers an excellent example of such a conception in which religion and morality, while independent in origins, are connected in the lives of individuals. Indeed, MacLagan goes as far as to suggest that without a religious or spiritual element one may not achieve the fullest conception of moral value. Hence, though religion is rejected as a direct source of moral value, it may be that religion is still important for a fully moral life.

Chapter Three: Art

3.1. Introduction

In the last chapter various permutations of the relationship between religion and morality were explored. The most prominent model of divine command was rejected as the source of the authority and status of moral value. The choice which one is left with is that either moral value is authoritative of itself, or there is an alternative source of moral value. One solution which has been suggested by various scholars is that art may be a suitable candidate for providing authority for moral value and thus upholding a moral realism. Moreover, the contention is that art can provide 'intimations of transcendence' and can thus reveal aspects of reality.

3.2. Art as the Supplier of Transcendence

There are two ways in which art is said to provide the source of moral value, namely, the social and the spiritual. In the first sense the claim is that art establishes a tradition which provides the necessary cohesion for moral values to be sustained. Such a position is advocated by Hans-Georg Gadamer⁶⁷. However, as this connection does not have direct bearing on the relationship between morality and religion it will not be addressed here. Instead the second claim will be focused upon.

⁶⁷ Gadamer contends that art can support moral value because it is tradition-bearing, and therefore is capable of both teaching something new and of revealing what is already known, but has been forgotten or somehow hidden. His argument runs as follows: "That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that the authority of what has been handed down to us – and not only what is clearly grounded – always has power over our attitudes and behaviour. All education depends on this, and even though, in the case of education, the educator loses his function when his charge comes of age and sets his own insight and decisions in the place of the authority of the educator, becoming mature does not mean that a person becomes his own master in the sense that he is freed of all tradition. The real force of morals, for example, is based on tradition. They are freely taken over but by no means created by a free insight or grounded on reasons. This is precisely what we call tradition: the ground of their validity" [Gadamer, 1989, pp.280-281]. Thus for Gadamer, the tradition of art provides a common background which gives a shared outlook which is enshrined in tradition. From the shared tradition a framework is maintained by reference to which moral values and codes are recognised and justified.

Many have turned to art rather than religion, not just because of the difficulties discussed in the last chapter, but also because many believe that religion (at least in its institutionalised form) has become irrelevant and inaccessible. In a similar vein to the humanist views noted in the last chapter, philosophers in the aesthetic field conclude that traditional religion is inevitably declining. Therefore, scholars argue that “if religion is not a living possibility for many today, it is left to art to inform the open spiritual aspect of our life” [O’Hear, 1988, p.159]. The supposition is that the decline of traditional religion has left:

a personal vacuum for many, a vacuum filled not by religious revival, but by the arts. ...[A]rt has become the private tabernacle to which even religious souls find themselves retreating to celebrate and to mourn, to contemplate and to fantasise the mysteries of individual and social fates. [Dahlstrom, 1991, p.236]

Therefore, the claim is that art functions in a manner akin to religion in that it can furnish one with the “sense that nothing is lost, and that the passing of time and death can be overcome” [O’Hear, 1988, p.80]. O’Hear intuitively connects moral value to that which is transcendent, noting that “it is hard to think about moral experience without being drawn to think of the transcendent” [O’Hear, 1992, p.47]. However, this for him does not mean that moral value must be directly connected to religion, rather he argues that, “apart from our lived sense of the sacredness of human life and of something approaching awe in matters to do with the creation, beginning, nurturing, and ending of specifically human life, we do have other non-religious intimations of the transcendent” [O’Hear, 1992, p.46]. Chief among ‘non-religious intimations’ for O’Hear is art⁶⁸, and to this end he quotes Rilke, who states:

Our task is to impress this preliminary, transient earth upon ourselves with so much suffering and so passionately that its nature rises up again ‘invisibly’ within us. We are the bees of the invisible. We drink ceaselessly the honey of the visible, so as to gather it into the great golden beehive of the invisible. [Rilke, 1936, p.335]

O’Hear’s contention is that art, like religion, can provide access to transcendence. As noted above, O’Hear holds that transcendence is directly connected to morality, in that it appears

⁶⁸ He cites by way of example, art produced by Proust, Cezanne, Rilke and Moore.

to be part of the moral experience. Consequently, the argument runs that art, not religion, can furnish the transcendent aspect of moral value.

3.3. Transcendence in Art

3.3.1. Defining Transcendence

The claims made by O'Hear for the transcendent capacity of art need further analysis, and most fundamentally the term transcendence requires definition. There appear to be two main qualities which commentators intend to signify when they use the term transcendence.

'Transcendence' in the first sense is comparatively mundane and uncontroversial. It is simply the recognition that art transcends the material of its making, since the significance of a work of art always exceeds its material components. Such transcendence is implied by Gadamer's approach which portrays art as the carrier of social meanings and symbols. Therefore, all that commentators may mean by allotting transcendence to art in this first sense is that art communicates meaning. For the purpose of this study, art will be assumed to be transcendent in this first sense. This assertion is difficult to dispute for art's capacity to convey meaning has long been recognised. For example, in the religious realm, art is held to be an able communicator, which is deemed to be superior to other methods such as philosophical and theological pronouncements. As such, art has been used to communicate religious messages, so much so that "the worship of every significant religious tradition regularly employs the media of art – poetry, music, painting, architecture" [Graham, 1983, p.124]⁶⁹. For the same reason, art has long been used politically and socially to convey meanings and messages. As this capacity of art to transcend its composition and carry

⁶⁹ By way of example, Richard Bell cites the aesthetic aspect of the Eucharist which he terms an 'imaginative construction'; created using repeated words, costumes, settings and potent symbols (including bread and wine). The aesthetic 'imaginative construction' adds the crucial sensual element to the religious ceremony, for it is "in its sensual presentment that the 'distant sensibilities' of the first meal and the continuity of continuous re-enactments with bread and wine work upon our present sensibilities" [Bell, 1986, p.186]. Without the aesthetic framework which allows the sensuous element to come to the fore, Bell suggests that "the Eucharist feast loses its value and efficaciousness" [Bell, 1986, p.187]. Indeed, the aesthetic is paramount, for "there can be no imaginative transformations *in me* if there are no 'imaginative constructions' embedded in the life of a religious tradition" [Bell, 1986, pp.185-186].

meanings beyond the aesthetic realm is relatively uncontroversial, this will be assumed to be the case. Hence, discussion about the possibility of transcendence will focus upon the second sense in which commentators use the term.

In the second sense, 'transcendence' denotes far more. The transcendence which it is suggested one can find in the experience of art appears to be akin to religious experience of spirituality or enlightenment. Thus, art is transcendent by virtue of its capacity to 'transport', to connect one to the spiritual⁷⁰, and, most importantly, to reveal the real. The contention is that art communicates not merely the artist's intention⁷¹, but that which is real and true. Therefore, transcendence signifies an experience by which one perceives something real. The supposition is that art, in a manner not dissimilar to religion, gives access to that which is real, true, and 'deep'. Artists are thought to be capable of exposing fundamental truths, and consequently the artist is capable of arousing:

in her audience an experience of exceptional clarity and intensity, and in doing so she shows us something about ourselves. She reveals something to us about the human condition, about how we respond to things given what we are, and also about what we might be – what we might be, of course, are artists ourselves, clearer eyed and fuller nerved than we are at the moment. Art as disclosure of truth. [Bontekoe and Crooks, 1992, p.212]

Thus, in the second sense, and the sense in which O'Hear uses it, transcendence is the capacity to reveal that which is true and real.

3.3.2. Beauty

One explanation as to why one experiences transcendence in art is that in the aesthetic realm one encounters 'beauty'. The place of beauty in art is controversial in the present climate, a fact which is due to two main reasons: first, artists in recent times have overtly rejected the attempt to encapsulate beauty in their work; and second, asserting the presence of beauty

⁷⁰ Using the term 'spiritual' is always a dangerous move in theology today, as it seems to mean whatever the author intends and hence covers a myriad of sins. However, in this instance it seems the most appropriate term as it conveys a sense of transcendence and sacredness which is not necessarily connected to a religious conception of the world.

⁷¹ As noted above art can be used to communicate any meaning desired.

involves the realist assumption that beauty, like goodness, is objective and independent of human wishes. Thus, aesthetic realists face the same criticisms as did the moral realists of Chapter One.

The first of these reasons does not affect the explanation that beauty accounts for the transcendence of art, as long as one recognises that beauty denotes those artefacts which aim to reveal ugliness and horror as well. In other words, beauty in this context must be seen as a generic term; the important factor is that the artist chases that which is real, and hence he captures beauty and truth. The second obstacle in ascribing this role to beauty is less easily overcome, for the same problems apply to the assertion that beauty is an objective value as were found in the moral arena in Chapter One. If one wishes to assert that transcendence derives from beauty one must provide a realist conception of beauty. In order to do this one must first define 'beauty'.

The nature of beauty is analysed by Jacques Maritain, and he highlights three essential characteristics:

Integrity, because the intellect is pleased in fullness of Being; *proportion or consonance*, because the intellect is pleased in order and unity; and *radiance or clarity*, because the intellect is pleased in light, or in that which, emanating from things, causes intelligence to see. [Maritain, 1953, p.123]

Maritain observes that the third criterion, that of radiance and clarity, is the most important of the three, though it is difficult to explain, for, "the very words we are obliged to use – the clarity, radiance, light, splendour – could be terribly misleading" [Maritain, 1953, p.123]. Focusing upon this third characteristic outlined by Maritain reveals that the value of beauty in art is typified by the elements which contemporary scholars would associate with spiritual experience. The terms of 'clarity', 'radiance', 'light' and 'splendour' indicate a religious experience or a feeling of enlightenment. This Maritain attributes to the fact that beauty is transcendental, and that, using Aristotelian categories, it is transcendent. Transcendence here should not be confused with 'The Transcendent', as used in a Christian context to denote

God. The term does not presuppose a supernatural realm; rather, beauty is held to be part of the fabric of the world. Thus, the term is used of those qualities which surpass all objects and situations, and though present in instances are always more than the sum of these instances. Therefore, transcendentals “cannot be enclosed in any class; they transcend and go beyond any genus or category, because they permeate or imbue everything, and are present in any thing whatsoever” [Maritain, 1953, p.124]. For example, in the case of beauty, beauty can be seen in particular instances, but is not defined by these instances, for beauty cannot be contained or limited. Thus, beauty is present in all other categories, for “just as everything *is* in its own way, and is *good* in its own way, so everything is beautiful in its own way” [Maritain, 1953, p.124]. Hence, beauty is a characteristic of all objects and situations for it is one of the ‘transcendentals’, and all instances contain “beauty, but kinds of beauty typically or basically different from one another, which imply no univocal community in species, genus, or category” [Maritain, 1953, p.124]. Thus, according to Maritain’s analysis, beauty is a transcendental, like “Unity, Truth, Goodness – which are but various aspects of Being – Being as undivided” [Maritain, 1953, p.124].

Such an account of beauty shows why beauty, found in art has the capacity to offer an experience of transcendence which is akin to religious experience. The connection of beauty to good and other transcendentals explains why experience of art can reveal aspects of reality such as beauty and goodness. Art, like religion and morals, is concerned with communicating those things which are highly significant and furnish human life with meaning. Indeed, until the last century this was explicitly accepted, and “the question of excellence with regard to Beauty was seldom separated from the question of excellence with regard to the moral good” [Bontekoe and Crooks, 1992, p.209]. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, beauty has the capacity, in Maritain’s terms, to cause the intellect to ‘see’. In other words beauty shows one what one could not perceive before, and from this comes the claims that art is a revealer, a truth teller, a conduit to reality; that art is transcendent.

3.3.3. The Danger of Art

However, although art is held by some to be transcendent and capable of revealing what is real, less desirable capacities are also attributed to art. From both the moral and religious perspective⁷², scholars have held that art corrupts and leads one into illusion. One of the most vehement adherents of such a position is Plato, so much so that he suggested that in his ideal Republic there would be no place for artists and they would be politely escorted to the borders.

Art for Plato is not a carrier of truth, but rather a perverter of it. Plato maintains that artists possess no true knowledge, for the artist “knows nothing about the reality but only about the appearance” [Republic, 601b, 1974, p.426]. Furthermore, he accuses art of focusing upon immoral men because they are far more interesting subjects for artistic portrayal. Thus, art presents and encourages not what is moral, but what is immoral. This tendency for immorality is compounded by art’s capacity to create false emotion. For Plato, emotion should be tempered, and he criticises the arts for encouraging emotion which would not be encouraged in real life, maintaining that art enforces feelings which “ought to be left to wither” [Republic, 606d, 1974, p.437]. However, the most dangerous aspect of art for Plato, in direct contrast to the claims above, is its propensity to delude people into believing they have found truth when they are really in a state of illusion and fantasy. Plato contends that art masquerades as beauty, and instead of allowing access to truth deceives the seeker and falsifies reality.

Plato’s concerns about the dangers of holding art in high esteem have reverberated down the centuries. Certainly one would be foolish to deny, in the face of Nazi propaganda films and

⁷² For example, the puritan position, which maintains that art corrupts and dilutes the religious message and, instead of communicating religious truth, it aestheticises them and focuses one’s attention not on what is true, but on what is beautiful. Therefore, art and the artistic packaging of religion is thought to distract from the substance of religion and to lead the believer into false religion and illusion. The aesthetic side is held to be idolatrous, and the aim of the puritan is to return believers to the ‘true core’ of religion and lead them away from idolatry. Others, however, take the opposite view, arguing that when “religious ceremonies and practices lose their aesthetic qualities they lose their liveliness as objects for an aesthetic response...In the end, this comes to a sort of ‘minimalist’ vision of religion, and at its fringe it takes on the guise of ‘anti-religion’” [Bell, 1986, pp.185-186].

so on⁷³, that art cannot be used to encourage immoral as well as moral acts and outlooks. The potential dangers of art to produce emotions which promote evil as well as good are well documented, and certainly it is a “fact that novels, films, plays...paintings and sculptures, can affect people’s emotion and influence their actions, sometimes in ways that appear to do harm” [Sorell, 1992, p.297]. However, acknowledging that art can be used to encourage immoral stances does not mean that art can never reveal reality. Moreover, such a criticism treats beauty not as a generic term but as only one side of the coin, and therefore is in danger of categorising beauty as what is attractive and desirable rather than that which reveals reality and truth.

The most damaging criticism which Plato presents to the view of art as transcendent is that art only leads to illusion and is disconnected from beauty. If this criticism is true then art is removed from the field of beauty, truth and goodness entirely. The question is not whether the artwork reveals beauty or ugliness, goodness or badness, all of which are part of reality, but whether art is capable of conveying what is real (of which beauty and good are important aspects).

3.3.4. Division of Art

The criticism that much art is simply illusion and delusion is hard to dismiss when one considers the variety of aesthetic works, many of which are intended simply to amuse or titillate. Indeed, the escapist element of art for many is a crucial aspect, as it offers relief from the stresses and strains of daily living⁷⁴. The way that commentators connect these threads and attempt to escape the criticisms of art, while continuing to contend that it can give access to transcendence, is to make a distinction between good art, which reveals the truth, and bad or mediocre art, which is illusory. The contention is that good art reveals that

⁷³ See Kieran, 1996, p.347, and his description of the artistry involved in *Triumph of the Will*.

⁷⁴ Yet, simply because something is escapist does not mean that it cannot reveal the real. For example, one of the ultimate escapist genres, that of fantasy fiction, is capable of revealing human truths. Indeed, it is possible to argue that in the setting of an alien world, many human truths are more obviously perceived.

which is real, whereas bad art fails to do this. Many commentators suggest such a path⁷⁵, and in order to make this distinction imagination is contrasted with fantasy. Fantasy art is held to be art in the service of desire, in that the artist uses art to express his own ends and to fulfil the desires of his spectators. By contrast, the artist who creates good art allows his imagination free rein to capture aspects of reality. This process is described by Bontekoe and Crooks, who argue that to create good art:

the artist must first cultivate within herself an attentiveness to...the 'inner necessity' of an artistic experience. And second, since sensing what one should do is one thing, but actually doing it is another, the artist must be dedicated to creating a work which realises in its complicated form as much of this 'inner necessity' as she can capture. [Bontekoe and Crooks, 1992, p.212]⁷⁶

Thus, for good art to be created – i.e. art which is transcendent and gives access to the real – the artist must not impose her own desires, but must allow her imagination the freedom to engender the real. In more traditional language the artist must search for beauty, and not beauty as society defines it⁷⁷, but beauty as connected to reality; beauty the “transcendent end” [Maritain, 1953, p.41]. Hence, Maritain presents the creation, and indeed the appreciation, of art, as a “longing for beauty, that pure creativity of the spirit, to the release of which the appetite basically tends, together with the intellect, in the vital dynamism of fine arts” [Maritain, 1953, pp.40-41]. Unless the artist is ‘in love with beauty’, to use Maritain’s phrase⁷⁸, the artist will fail to produce good art and will only achieve mediocre art. The artist who does not follow this path, and “for whatever reason, fails to be guided by this inner necessity in the production of her work, and who invites the viewer, as a consequence, to enter into an experience which is ‘muddy’ or incoherent” [Bontekoe and Crooks, 1992, p.212] will never achieve beauty. By dividing art in this way theorists maintain that they have addressed the criticisms of art; accepting that they are applicable to

⁷⁵ For example, Collingwood, Bontekoe and Crooks, Bell and Murdoch (who we will discuss in the next chapter).

⁷⁶ The term ‘inner necessity’, used by Bontekoe and Crooks, seems to equate to the second definition of transcendence. See Section 3.3.1.

⁷⁷ Bell argues that good art embodies real beauty, not the aesthetic concept of beauty at the time. Thus, the “good artist has fought against the popular conception of beauty, the bad artist has accepted it” [Bell, 1983, p.163].

⁷⁸ See Maritain, 1953, p.43.

many works, but denying that they apply to all. Hence, good art is capable of revealing the real and is transcendent, while bad art is fantasy and reveals nothing (or nothing other than the desires of the artist).

3.4. Values in Art

3.4.1. Absolute Value

As noted above, asserting the presence of beauty in aesthetic experience is one means by which the transcendent and spiritual factors of art can be accounted for. However, this contention that beauty is connected to the good and the real assumes that there is “a class of aesthetic values rooted in the fundamentals...that are entirely absolute” [Findlay, 1972, p.103]. Such an explanation returns to the problems of realism and anti-realism which are just as much features of aesthetic theory as they are of ethical theory. Aesthetic values, no less than ethical values, are regarded as queer entities, difficult to categorise and describe. Indeed, the values of the aesthetic realm have been regarded by some as more questionable than those of the ethical realm because they are “essentially perceptual”, and at the same time “perceptually elusive” [Pettit, 1983, p.24]. For example, it is often claimed that the aesthetic values are simply a matter of taste and preference. Such a position equates to non-cognitive positions, such as Ayer’s, for which aesthetic values are entirely a matter of individual attitude and convey information only about an individual’s state of mind. As in the moral debate, scholars divide upon this issue.

One commentator who asserts the realism of aesthetic value is J. N. Findlay, who declares that a “value-free world is, in fact, a non-empirical figment, and among the many values inherent in things...are aesthetic values” [Findlay, 1972, p.92]. Findlay maintains that any aesthetic theory must concentrate upon ‘transcendental universals’ [Findlay, 1972, p.91], and he criticises those theorists who reject absolute values, deriding them as “utterly lost in one or other form of unprincipled empiricism...(to the extent)...that hardly anything they have to say throws great light on aesthetic questions” [Findlay, 1972, p.89]. Findlay suggests

a realist approach, and his theory of choice is a “transcendental theory, one which connects the beautiful and other objects of aesthetic appreciation with conscious experience as such, and so explains the all-pervasive, highest-level character of aesthetic principles and notions, and their elevation above personal and social contingencies” [Findlay, 1972, p.94]. He adopts a view of beauty similar to that of Maritain, and in addition he suggests further criteria by which beauty can be discovered, namely ‘perspicuity’ and ‘poignancy’.

Findlay advises that beauty can be discovered when “an object...come[s] before us... *perspicuously* and *poignantly*. These are the two aesthetic fundamentals” [Findlay, 1972, p.97]. ‘Poignancy’ he defines as “the kind of shockingness and impressiveness that expends itself in vision” [Findlay, 1972, p.97], without which the work of art is empty and meaningless. By ‘perspicuity’ he means that which is related to character and structure as opposed to content; “a presence to consciousness which has broken through success and mastery, whatever impediments and obstacles there may have been in the way of such success, but which also involves a certain stationariness or arrest” [Findlay, 1972, p.97]. In other words, perspicuity ensures an aesthetic frame of mind which involves an enraptured disinterestedness in which the spectator focuses upon the object, and poignancy concerns the quality of the work which shines through from the object to the spectator. When both come together, the spectator is “rapt, caught up, fascinated, under a spell” [Findlay, 1972, p.97], lost in the “intensity of that vision” [Findlay, 1972, p.98]. Findlay insists that within his aesthetic framework:

any first-order character of objects enters the ranks of aesthetic objects, insofar as it is perspicuously and poignantly presented and while its precise place in those ranks may seem to depend on its character alone, it really can be seen on reflective analysis to depend on the perspicuity and poignancy with which it is presented. [Findlay, 1972, p.102]⁷⁹

In other words, an object’s aesthetic status depends on the presence of beauty which is signalled by these two points of reference. Taking both perspicuity and poignancy into

⁷⁹ Although he does accept that certain objects are more perspicuous and poignant – and thus more likely to arrest the aesthetic consciousness – than others.

account, one can detect the presence of beauty, for “the beautiful is, and may be, sought in infinitely various directions: it will reveal itself wherever the barriers which hinder the emergence of perspicuity and poignancy can be overcome” [Findlay, 1972, p.103]. In this manner Findlay attempts to outline a method by which the value of beauty can be detected in many and diverse situations. Hence, it is the absolute value of beauty which imbues the artwork with its quality, and which enables it to communicate the real.

3.4.2. Alternative Schema

Yet, this said, many are wary of theories which rely upon absolute values for the same reasons that absolute moral values are dismissed by anti-realists. Therefore, while wishing to maintain that there is something worthwhile in aesthetic experience, there are some who do not wish to base this upon an appeal to absolute values. One philosopher who attempts such a task is Malcolm Budd, who contends that in the experience of art one does encounter aesthetic value, but that this value is internal to the work itself.

Budd’s concern is with what makes the work valuable as a work of art: the work’s ‘intrinsic value’. Hence, he excludes other potential sources of value, such as “cognitive value...social value...educational value...historical value...sentimental value...religious value...economic value and...therapeutic value” [Budd, 1995, p.1]. These values he regards as ‘instrumental’, defining instrumental value as the effect the work has on “the mind, character and behaviour of an individual or a group” [Budd, 1995, p.7]. However, he does allow that “many of what are thought of as benefits of the experience of art are intrinsic to the experience, not mere products of it” [Budd, 1995, p.7]. Therefore, he suggests that one can distinguish between intrinsic and instrumental value by assessing the consequences of the work. In some cases, such “benefits contribute to making the experience intrinsically valuable and partly constitute the ways in which it is so” [Budd, 1995, p.7]. In such cases, what would usually be considered instrumental value may be considered to have intrinsic worth. This qualification enables him to deny that he is arguing for a thesis which is “tantamount to the doctrine of ‘Art for Art’s sake’” [Budd, 1995, p.9]. Rather, he is recognising the potential

import of “any values...(the work)...may possess that are not art-specific or specifically aesthetic” [Budd, 1995, p.10]. These other values are not his primary concern, for he maintains that the “prime task of a theory of value in art is to elucidate the distinctive value of art” [Budd, 1995, p.2], and it is this distinctive value – which he terms ‘artistic value’ – that he is attempting to unearth. For Budd, the experience of a work of art is all important, for “the value of a work of art as a work of art is intrinsic to the work in the sense that it is (determined by) the intrinsic value of the experience the work offers” [Budd, 1995, p.4]. He limits the experience of a work of art to an interaction between oneself and the artwork. His contention is that “a work of art is valuable as art if it is such that the experience it offers is intrinsically valuable” [Budd, 1995, p.5]. Thus, what makes the work of art valuable is the presence of artistic qualities which can be perceived in the work. Such qualities are embodied in the work itself; they are not detachable, for “the experience a work of art offers is an experience *of the work itself*, and the valuable qualities of a work are qualities *of the work*, not of the experience it offers” [Budd, 1995, p.5]. In order to perceive these artistic values, the work of art must be approached with understanding in order for full comprehension of the work to be achieved. Therefore, he argues that “your experience must be imbued with an awareness of (all) the aesthetically relevant properties” [Budd, 1995, p.4].

Artistic value, then, resides within the work of art and can be known if one knows the relevant features and follows “the fundamental procedure, the canonical method, for finding out what the artistic value of a work is” [Budd, 1995, p.11]. Budd’s method is simply that one must undergo an experience of the work itself – with, of course, an understanding of the work⁸⁰. This ‘experiential methodology’ he supports with the quote of John Stuart Mill, that “the only evidence for whether an experience is worth having for its own sake is the verdict of those who are familiar with the experience” [Budd, 1995, p.12]. The presence of artistic value in a work is a “matter that your experience declares to you” [Budd, 1995, p.12]; it is detected when the experience of a work is ‘intrinsically’ rewarding. Thus, “if you find the

⁸⁰ Given certain circumstances it may be possible to form a judgement of a work one is not acquainted with. The examples Budd uses are either when one trusts the judgement of another who has undergone the experience of the work and one can imagine the experience through their description, or alternatively one can extrapolate from works with which one is personally acquainted.

work intrinsically rewarding and you are right to do so, then the experience it offers is intrinsically valuable" [Budd, 1995, pp.12-13] because of the presence of artistic value.

The placing of artistic value within the experience of a work of art suggests that the discovery of value is subjective. However, Budd's qualifying clause – 'if you are right to do so' – reveals that this is not the case. It is clear that for Budd, artistic value either is or is not present, and one must give reasons for one's judgement. To conclude that the experience of a certain work of art has artistic value it is essential that one's "response should be appropriate or justified" [Budd, 1995, p.12]. Justification is twofold: first, it must be impossible to obtain the value gleaned from the experience of the work "without undergoing the experience of the work" [Budd, 1995, p.13]; and second, the work must have intrinsic value. If the experience is valuable for a 'detachable reward', then "you are not finding the work valuable *as a work of art*" [Budd, 1995, p.13], and if it is not intrinsically valuable as such, then it lacks artistic value⁸¹. A justifiable assessment, then, occurs when a spectator has experienced the work for themselves, bearing in mind all the aesthetically relevant properties.

Budd believes that he has presented a means to evaluate the 'value' which a work of art contains, and to account for what it is that gives a work of art its uniquely aesthetic aspect. Artistic value is judged according to given criteria and reasons, and one must be able to defend one's assessment of a work by recourse to "features of the work that are open to others, that endow it with value, and that constitute good reasons for responding as you do" [Budd, 1995, p.40]. Therefore, artistic value does not possess the same degree of "relativity that attaches to sentimental value, which is relative both to persons and times" [Budd, 1995, p.38]. In determining artistic value, although there is always the possibility of error, Budd is adamant that "it does not follow from the fact that someone judges a work to have a certain artistic value that it does so" [Budd, 1995, p.39]. Therefore, artistic value, though taking account of subjective elements, is not "relative in any disturbing way" [Budd, 1995, p.38].

⁸¹ This persuasion leads Budd to dismiss as misguided such theories which see art 'as communication'.

He rejects both the terms 'objective' and 'subjective', believing that it is best to describe artistic value as "intersubjective" [Budd, 1995, p.39]. At the last, Budd answers the question he posed himself: "What is the value of art?" [Budd, 1995, p.1]. His solution is that the value of art lies in the artwork possessing artistic value that "is intrinsic, sentiment-dependent, intersubjective, anthropocentric and incommensurable" [Budd, 1995, p.43]⁸².

However, even though Budd denies that his artistic value is subjective, it is constrained by the limits of the work. Thus, there is no recourse to beauty which precludes the possibility of art's connection to reality. The aesthetic value which Budd describes is concerned with the artist, the spectator and the work; there is no place at which claims for art's truth-telling capacities can be said to originate. For it is the work itself, rather than what the work reveals, which produces the aesthetic experience in which aesthetic value is found. Furthermore, Budd overtly disconnects the aesthetic from all other values which separates the aesthetic from the religious and the moral.

3.4.3. Summary

Budd's attempt to account for aesthetic value, without introducing absolute values, actually reduces the scope of meaning which art can convey. Instead of referring to values and reality, artworks refer only to themselves. Therefore, it seems that to claim art is transcendent in the second sense we outlined above, one must connect art to something outside the artwork. Hence, if art is to have the capacities to reveal the real, then a realist construct of aesthetic values is necessary. A schema like Budd's is inadequate as it disconnects value from beauty and goodness, and therefore also from realism. In order to claim that art is transcendent, in the second sense, one must base one's aesthetic theory upon some form of realism.

⁸² Budd's 'anthropocentrism' denotes that judgements of artistic value are valid only within the human sphere made by those who "possess a distinctively human sensibility" [Budd, 1995, p.39].

3.5. The Link between Art and Religion

At this juncture the question that remains to be answered is where art's transcendence is derived from, i.e. whether transcendence is a quality of art and the art experience, or whether the transcendence comes from a further source. Though certain thinkers surmise that transcendence, via beauty, is a property of art, others have suggested that the transcendence found in art is supplied by religion. Indeed, there do appear to be parallels between the aesthetic and the religious, and the claims which are being made for aesthetic experience are not dissimilar to descriptions of religious experience. The correspondence between art and religion is supported by "the fact that we speak of inspiration in both art and religion, and the fact that we have an inclination to connect the sublime and the divine and to find a measure of transportation in both" [Graham, 1983, p.124]. For many art is the primary source of spiritual experience, hence "art acquires its own religious significance...(and)...a religion of art is celebrated, not so much as part of, but rather in contrast to traditional religion" [Dahlstrom, 1991, p.237]. Thus, transcendence in art is similar – and fulfils similar roles – to transcendence in religion. For example, the description of how good art is created sounds very much like prayer or meditation in that the artist, or indeed the spectator, is pictured as contemplating and waiting for the encounter with beauty. Thus, the question is whether the transcendence found in art is not merely akin to religious transcendence, but actually is religious transcendence itself.

3.5.1. Art Dependent upon Religion

Certain thinkers⁸³ maintain that the access to truth and meaning which art provides is dependent upon its connection to religion. There are various ways in which this dependence can be conceived. For example, it is undeniably the case that art has been dependent upon religion in that for the greater part of the last two millennia the church has been the foremost patron of the arts and the largest commissioner of artwork. More fundamentally, artists have relied on religion for both personal inspiration and for the content of much of their work.

⁸³ For example, Fuller and Steiner.

Moreover, a greater part of the symbolism and meaning which works of art carry depends upon wider religious and spiritual associations to which artworks allude. Even in contemporary, ostensibly secular, art, religious symbols are still common currency as carriers of a shared – even if not explicitly religious – meaning and significance. Although the use of religious imagery in art is indisputable, the question is not whether artists have turned to religion for meaning, but, more pertinently, whether art necessarily needs religion in order to be capable of carrying true meaning or whether the use of religion is incidental and dependent upon the context in which the work is fashioned. A number of authors assert that art is not contextually, but necessarily, tied to religion, and therefore is only transcendent by virtue of its connection to religion. Peter Fuller, for example, argues that the loss of the hegemonising force of religion has had “disastrous effects on both aesthetics and ethics” [Fuller, 1985, p.88]. He alleges that without the background of a religious world-view, artists can no longer create good art, and art cannot even fulfil the functions it once did. Fuller recognises that there are alternative sources, such as ‘nature’, which can be turned to for inspiration; by way of example he cites the work of Turner. Fuller adjudges that Turner did manage to produce good art, but that this was only because he believed that nature was the handiwork of God. Without the belief in God’s presence, and the transforming immanence found in nature, nature loses its significance. For Fuller, if nature is to provide a shared symbolic order, God must not be an “optional extra” [Fuller, 1985, p.122], but at the centre. Without a belief in God underpinning the source, Fuller argues that alternatives such as ‘nature’ are ineffective⁸⁴. Thus, Fuller’s position is that only a living religion can provide the source which art needs to flourish, asserting that “art does not prosper if it is separated from religion for long” [Fuller, 1985, p.190]. Without religion, he suggests we are left with “bits and pieces of broken symbolic orders” [Fuller, 1985, p.13],

⁸⁴ In support of his thesis, Fuller turns to the work of William Blake. Blake attempted to paint as if he was “still able to make use of nature as a wholly convincing alternative to religious iconography” [Fuller, 1985, p.122], but instead of producing work which can transform and transfigure, he only managed to produce work which is “dull and dead” [Fuller, 1985, p.123]. However, this example is strange as Blake does use religious iconography, and many would argue that his work is far from being dull and dead.

and good artwork can no longer be produced⁸⁵. Consequently, art is unable to communicate truth and to offer experiences of transcendence.

A further scholar who addresses this issue is George Steiner, who argues, as O'Hear did, that art is a natural carrier of transcendence and spiritual experience. He maintains that, in the present climate, art's ability to convey truth is of particular significance, because contemporary linguistic theories of post-modernism and deconstruction have disconnected reality from the world of language, and therefore have severed the relationship between discourse and the world. As a result, although Steiner praises language's ability to create "by virtue of nomination" [Steiner, 1989, p.56] and the unbounded possibilities it offers – "only language knows no conceptual, no projective finality. We are at liberty to say anything" [Steiner, 1989, p.53] – in the current context he believes genuine communication is precluded. An understanding of language which denies correspondence results in a situation in which there is no "access to intelligibility, to coherence (narrative) to the means of persuasion" [Steiner, 1989, p.92]. In fact, no means whereby to convey anything at all. The result of such world-views is that "speech can neither articulate the deeper truths of consciousness, nor can it convey the sensory" [Steiner, 1989, p.111]. Art, he argues, has not been subject to the same uncertainty, and continues to communicate those truths which language cannot. Therefore, these truths are best communicated by art which has "sources deeper than language" [Steiner, 1989, p.112]. He maintains that fundamental truths should remain undeclared in the present climate, in order to avoid the "nihilistic logic and consequent extremity of the after-Word" [Steiner, 1989, p.115] that is indicative of deconstruction.

⁸⁵ He does note exceptions such as Henry Moore, who avoids "the absence of a shared symbolic order through an imaginative, and emotionally charged, involvement with human and natural form" [Fuller, 1985, p.151], and therefore he concedes that "secular art of high sentiment is still possible in our time" [Fuller, 1985, p.152]. However, such instances he judges to be anomalies, and therefore of no threat to his thesis. Many would disagree with Fuller, and argue that the 'brokenness' of modern culture is one of the factors which aids the production of great art.

3.5.2. Transcendence from God

Although Steiner asserts that art is best capable of communicating truth and meaning, he alleges that the transcendence which it conveys is derived not from beauty but from an encounter with 'real presence', with 'the other'. Steiner declares that, in making and responding to art, one recognises an "irreducible autonomy of presence, of 'otherness', in art and text which denies either adequate paraphrase or unanimity of finding" [Steiner, 1989, p.214]. He contends that the transcendence which one discovers in art is not of art, but arises from the presence of the 'other', which is encountered in art. Art has a natural tendency to engender such an encounter because art is the "best access we have to the 'otherness'" [Steiner, 1989, p.164]. This he attributes to the fact that art is a natural medium for transcendence:

All good art and literature begin in immanence. But they do not stop there...it is the enterprise and privilege of the aesthetic to quicken into lit presence the continuum between temporality and eternity, between matter and spirit, between man and 'the other'. [Steiner, 1989, p.227]

However, although art communicates transcendence, this originates not from art but from God, and it is this presence which "underwrites the presumption of creativity, of signification in our encounters" [Steiner, 1989, p.216]. Hence, the capacity which previous commentators attributed to art – reality, meaning, value – is not a quality of art, but of God, for "the meaning of meaning is a transcendent postulate" [Steiner, 1989, p.216]. Thus, the transcendence, though revealed in art, does not arise from the nature of art, but is bestowed by 'The Transcendent', as theologically understood. In fact, Steiner uses the experience of transcendence in art as an argument for the existence of God, holding that art provides the grounds for "a wager on transcendence...that there is in the art-act and its reception...a presumption of presence" [Steiner, 1989, p.214]. Therefore, though Steiner does assert the transcendent and revealing properties of art, he ultimately traces these to religion. Presumably, therefore, without the presence of God, art would not have the capacity to carry meaning and reveal the truth. Consequently, though Steiner grants special faculties to art, his conclusion is essentially the same as Fuller's, namely, that art is dependent upon religion.

3.6. Conclusion

The claim that the transcendence found in the experience of art is dependent on religion enforces a return to the dilemma of the last chapter. The claim, as made by O'Hear, that art can provide the source for morality, in effect results in the same claim that morality is dependent upon religion. The dependence of morality on religion was rejected, and therefore it seems that the claim that moral value depends upon art must also be rejected. Rejecting religion as the source of art does not mean, as Fuller claims, that there is no source of aesthetic values, and that "judgements of aesthetic value, once rooted in a *sensus communis* now find a foothold in nothing firmer than the quicksand of personal taste" [Devereaux, 1991, p.59]. However, it does mean that we must look for a realism of aesthetic and moral values which is not dependent upon religion.

Even if it is not the case that art is dependent upon religion, basing moral values upon aesthetic values does not solve the problem of moral realism since aesthetic realism is no more guaranteed than moral realism. Indeed, in the contemporary climate there are many who would argue that there is less consensus about art – which is considered a matter of individual taste – than there is with regard to moral value. Ethical values are often deemed to be more important and less subjective than aesthetic values, as ethical values are seen as fundamental to human living whereas aesthetic judgements are viewed as peripheral. Given this, any attempt to ground moral values in the aesthetic may be unhelpful, for "if we have no grounds for agreement in moral matters, what grounds for agreement can aesthetics furnish?" [Devereaux, 1991, pp.59-60]. The way forward is perhaps to look at the possibility of deriving a moral realism which is based upon no external source, which may also be applicable to aesthetic realism, in the hope of establishing the realism of both.

Therefore, though art cannot be looked to as the source of transcendence for moral value, the journey into the relation of art and moral values has been rewarding. This chapter has further revealed the similarities between art, religion and morality, and has again shown that if moral values are queer entities so too are the entities in many other aspects of life. Indeed,

all these areas are concerned with truth and reality; defining factors in the human condition and ones which are not easily categorised. The connection between these spheres is evident in ordinary experience:

Our experiences, our encounters with and in the world and the decisions we make as a result, do not typically come in separate *packets*, with the moral, aesthetic, economic, religious, scientific, etc. serving as viewing stands distanced from one another so that we look at the world first from one and then from another standpoint. [Muelder Eaton, 1991, p.226]

In sum then, this chapter has further emphasised the relation of moral value to transcendence, and thus to the religious sphere. Though relationships of dependency, both religious and aesthetic, have been rejected, it is clear that other fundamental connections remain, and that the relation of the religious to moral value continues even for those who wish to reject traditional religion. The experience of art, though not providing a moral source, does suggest that transcendence, even to the point of what would be considered religious, is present in the moral experience.

Chapter Four: The Philosophy of Iris Murdoch

4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapters various permutations of the relationship between moral value and religion have been discussed. Now the topic moves to the philosophy of Iris Murdoch, in whose work all the themes previously discussed come together. Murdoch's philosophy is the focal point of this thesis because she maintains that religion and art are intimately bound to the moral quest. Murdoch contends that moral value is self-supporting in that it needs no extraneous support to account for its existence. However, she also postulates that a complete conception of moral value must include religious and aesthetic elements. Murdoch's philosophy amounts to a claim for the realism of moral values; values are absolute and objective and must be considered not only philosophically but aesthetically and religiously as well if an accurate picture of moral value is to be formed. It is important to bear in mind that a significant part of the work involved in producing this chapter⁸⁶ was in the ordering and presentation of Murdoch's unsystematic philosophy. The systematisation of this chapter is drawn from the whole of Murdoch's philosophy and enables her thought to be discussed thematically. Accordingly, in this chapter Murdoch's broad conception of the moral life will be explored, as will the connections of moral value to art and religion and her realist claims for moral values, especially the good, will be analysed.

4.2. The Context of Murdoch's Philosophy

Murdoch's moral philosophy is formed very much in response to contemporary philosophical positions, and therefore the concepts which Murdoch opposes must be borne in mind when considering her philosophy.

Murdoch's philosophy stands in opposition to most current philosophical thought. In particular she is critical of existentialism, behaviourism, linguistic analysis and

⁸⁶ This is also true for the next chapter.

utilitarianism. Murdoch alleges that these philosophies present distorted, and at best partial, depictions of moral value and the moral life. The composite moral position which Murdoch rejects is described by Patricia J. O'Conner as the 'liberal' view [O'Conner, 1996, p.7], and by Fergus Kerr as a mixture of existentialism and 'Oxford moral philosophy' [Kerr, 1997, p.71].

At the core of Murdoch's rejection of contemporary philosophy is her supposition that prevalent philosophies neglect the reality of ordinary experience. This is shown as early as 1959 in Murdoch's attack on Sartre-inspired existentialism, characterised as 'Totalitarian Man', and that of linguistic analysis, summarised as 'Ordinary Language Man'. Murdoch deems that:

Both philosophies tend toward solipsism. Neither pictures virtue as concerned with anything real outside ourselves. Neither provides us with a standpoint for considering real human beings in their variety, and neither presents us with any technique for exploring and controlling our own spiritual energy. Ordinary Language Man is too abstract, too conventional: he incarnates the commonest and vaguest network of conventional moral thought; and Totalitarian Man is too concrete, too neurotic: he is simply the centre of an extreme decision, man stripped and made anonymous by extremity. [Murdoch, 1997, pp.269-270]

Since 1959 these philosophical streams have changed and expanded, as too have Murdoch's criticisms. However, the basis of her criticisms remains the same, namely that these views are out of step with experience and, crucially, that they threaten one's ability to describe and discuss important areas of human life such as moral value.

It is this reasoning that leads her to dismiss the existentialist tendency to portray moral choice as simply a matter dependent on the will. The existentialist pictures moral choice as a survey of all the relevant facts upon which a judgement is made and implemented by an act of will. Murdoch protests that this is not an accurate representation of moral judgement. Instead, she asserts that the moral life is far more complex; it is an internal process which is independent of particular acts. For Murdoch, it is the 'inner life', not the will, which is the most important component in the moral life, a conclusion she claims is upheld by the

phenomenology of moral experience. Not only does she conclude that existentialism does not accord with experience, but she rejects both linguistic and positivist philosophies on similar grounds. Such philosophies (as we noted in Chapter One) assume that there is a division between fact and value. This premise Murdoch believes is contradicted by experience. The distinction between facts and values, as noted in Chapter One, threatens the realism of values and the very existence of the inner life, since the only testimony and evidence which supports the existence of the inner life is personal and subjective, and therefore unsatisfactory as far as such philosophies are concerned. All these positions she rejects on the grounds that they are inconsistent with ordinary experience:

Murdoch is totally opposed to all those theories in ethics and aesthetics which may be classified as non-realist, anti-realist or projectivist. She rejects any philosophical story according to which we should accept that we project moral properties on to a world, and situation and entities within it, which in themselves have no moral properties. She believes that the non-cognitivist tradition in moral philosophy is just wildly untrue to what everybody knows perfectly well. [Kerr, 1997, p.84]

Murdoch's philosophy is written in order to dispel what she considers false descriptions of the moral life. Primary in her own philosophy is the constant return to ordinary experience, and it is ordinary experience which she asserts provides the evidence for the moral theory she endorses.

4.3. Murdoch's Moral Realism

4.3.1. The Inner Life and the Continual Moral Struggle

In contrast to other philosophies, Murdoch asserts that the 'inner life' is the most important element in how one makes moral decisions. The reality of the inner life, she contends, is attested to by experience, and remains unquestioned until one moves into philosophical spheres. Thus, in her philosophy there is no notion of a choosing will⁸⁷. Rather, she

⁸⁷ Murdoch does not dismiss the will completely, and she does accept that there are moments of moral intensity when the moral choice does feel like the existentialist description of 'void'. However, she reasons that by the time such moments arise, the choice has been, to all intents and purposes, already made.

emphasises the continual struggle of the inner life. She argues that though moments of dilemma may stand out in one's mind in retrospect, in fact, moral choice is the result of a continual process. It is in the perpetual moral struggle that one's moral character is determined, and this dictates one's action in a time of dilemma. One's character is formulated by the small things of life – one's habits and thoughts – and it is these which influence behaviour in moments of intense moral choice. Consequently, Murdoch argues that decisions which are taken at occasions of moral dilemma, although they may feel like acts of will, are, in actuality, already made. The way one is in the world – one's moral habits, the actions and people which one admires – ensures a tendency to act in a certain way in times of crisis. Therefore, Murdoch postulates that one moral choice is more likely than another simply by virtue of the character one has.

This description of moral choice reveals clearly the importance of the inner life, for in Murdoch's schema moral decision-making occurs almost entirely in the inner world and is hidden from observation. Murdoch illustrates her vision in the following example of the way a mother-in-law changes her mind about her daughter-in-law. In the example, a moral act has occurred even though there is no change in observable action or the empirical facts; the moral act takes place wholly in the inner realm:

A mother, whom I shall call M, feels hostility to her daughter-in-law, whom I shall call D. M finds D quite a good-hearted girl, but while not exactly common yet certainly unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement. D is inclined to be pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile. M does not like D's accent or the way D dresses. M feels that her son has married beneath him. Let us assume for purposes of the example that the mother, who is a very 'correct' person, behaves beautifully to the girl throughout, not allowing her real opinion to appear in any way. We might underline this aspect of the example by supposing that the young couple have emigrated or that D is now dead: the point being to ensure that whatever is in question as *happening* happens entirely in M's mind...M tells herself: 'I am old fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again'. Here I assume that M observes D or at least reflects deliberately about D, until gradually her vision of D alters...D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous,

not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on. And as I say, *ex hypothesi*, M's outward behaviour, beautiful from the start, in no way alters. [Murdoch, 1970, pp.17-18]

This example perfectly elucidates that the inner life is all. The moral 'act' of the mother-in-law occurs entirely in the inner realm and is unobservable. This change is not achieved by making an isolated decision, but comes about by the mother-in-law's gradual reassessment and readjustment of her thoughts.

Moral change is engendered by progressive changes in thoughts and actions, and "the paradigm of moral choice is not the will's wild leap back from the data, but the small, regular, repeated actions of attention" [O'Conner, 1996, p.67]. Consequently, moral change is not a simple or an easy process; it cannot be done merely by a reassessment of one's life and a decision to change in an instant. Moral change is a long and complex process which involves reflections about one's life, dedication to becoming a certain sort of person, the forming of new habits and a gradual changing of the way one approaches the world and others. Moral change is possible; it is not fast or easy, but it can be done by a painstaking attention to the small details of one's life and the constant rejection of what is immoral and movement towards that which is moral. Hence, in Murdoch's schema, there is no danger of reductionism (made by both sides in the previous discussion). Moral value and the moral life cannot be thought of as simply doing the right action in a particular situation, but must be viewed in a more holistic manner.

4.3.2. The Apprehension of Moral Value

Murdoch's conviction that the 'inner' realm is not only real but forms the foundation of the moral life affects her perception of values themselves. For her, the recognition of values is, like moral choice, a continual part of everyday life, for "we ordinarily conceive and apprehend goodness in terms of virtues which belong to a continuous fabric of being" [Murdoch, 1970, p.30]. Just as Murdoch argues that the inner life is part of moral phenomenology, so she asserts is experience of moral value.

Murdoch, like the realists of Chapter One, argues that moral values are discovered not made. In her fictional dialogue of *Acastos*, for instance, Acastos (a serious questioning youth) comments that, “morality *feels* more like discovering something than just inventing it” [Murdoch, 1987, p.85]. The reality of moral values, Murdoch maintains, is revealed by experience, and she alleges that “what is absolute and unconditional is what each man clearly and distinctly knows in his own soul, the difference between right and wrong. It is something intimate, deep in consciousness, inseparable from one’s sense of oneself” [Murdoch, 1992, p.439]. Moral values for Murdoch are not concerned with one small area of life, such as how one should act in ‘moral’ situations, but they are at the very core of how human beings understand and describe life, and thus they are necessary for comprehending the depth of what it means to be human. The continual process of moral judgement – the comparison of different situations, acts and thoughts – is for Murdoch the very means by which human beings order and assess the world. Accordingly, human beings are essentially moral:

The human scene is one of moral failure combined with the remarkable continued return to an idea of goodness as unique and absolute. What can be compared to this? If space visitors tell us that there is no value on their planet, this is not like saying there are no material objects. We would ceaselessly *look* for value in their society, wondering if they were lying, had different values, had misunderstood. [Murdoch, 1992, p.427]

This quote shows the fundamental place of morality in Murdoch’s conception of human life, in which moral values are discovered, real and objective; a conviction which she deems straightforward for those who are ‘uncorrupted’ by philosophy.

The most important moral value, and the one upon which Murdoch’s philosophy is founded and centred, is ‘the good’. Murdoch’s position is taken very much from Plato, to the extent that Kerr describes her whole philosophy as the call to “go back to Plato and the sovereignty of the form of the good to save ourselves morally, ethically – indeed to save Western civilisation from anarchy” [Kerr, 1997, p.68]. The good, like all moral values, is discovered in everyday moral life, and its recognition is part and parcel of life. Recognising and

comprehending the good is neither difficult or mysterious, and as Murdoch is swift to point out, “there is no complicated secret doctrine” [Murdoch, 1970, p.74]. For Murdoch, values are real and knowable; “the good is there, whether or not we perceive or pursue it. It is not impossible to get from what ‘is’ to what ‘ought’ to be” [Kerr, 1997, p.78]. (Murdoch’s arguments for conceiving of the good in an objective way will be considered later, but for now our interest lies in the place of the good in the moral life.)

4.3.3. The Illusion-Ridden Nature of the Human Condition

Despite Murdoch’s insistence that moral values can be known in everyday life, full recognition of moral values is no straightforward matter. For her, as for Plato, human beings are sunk in illusion and unable to see what is real. Murdoch’s reading of the human condition means that she broadly “accepts the traditional Christian view that sin is universal and almost impossible to avoid” [Burns, 1997, p.303]. Consequently, Murdoch declares that “it is more natural to us to be egocentric, to see the world as coloured by our own needs, desires, and fantasies” [O’Conner, 1996, p.77], than it is to perceive reality. Such a negative notion of the human psyche threatens Murdoch’s notion of moral improvement. Indeed, she declares that the “great enemy of the moral life is the ego, which is constantly yapping at our heels and persistently seeking to be consoled” [Dunbar, 1978, p.518]. The difficulty involved in perceiving reality extends to values, and hence, though real, values are obscured by illusion. Correctly recognising that which is real is no easy task because it is only possible to “choose within the world...(that we)...can *see*, in the moral sense of ‘see’ which implies clear vision” [Murdoch, 1970, p.37]. Therefore, achieving clear vision and countering illusions is in a very real sense the moral task. The effort to escape illusion and self-delusion, and to see reality is a moral effort, for how well one pictures reality determines how well one is able to make moral judgements. Clear vision is necessary for moral improvement to be possible, and striving to see reality is a process which elicits knowledge about oneself and the world:

At the level of serious common sense and of an ordinary non-philosophical reflection about the nature of morals it is perfectly

obvious that goodness *is* connected with knowledge: not with impersonal quasi-scientific knowledge of the ordinary world, whatever that may be, but with a refined and honest perception of what is really the case, a patient and just discernment and exploration of what confronts one, which is the result not simply of opening one's eyes but of a certainly perfectly familiar kind of moral discipline. [Murdoch, 1970, p.38]

Therefore, although Murdoch does argue for a realist conception of moral values, recognising these values is not automatic. The difficulty involved in correctly discerning moral values goes some way to explaining the obstacles which confronted the realists of Chapter One. For, if moral value is not merely given, but must be sought, then some will see moral values more distinctly than others. Such an interpretation accounts for why there are varied moral interpretations and why individuals have disparate moral motivations.

4.3.4. The Place of Faith in the Moral Life

In order to elaborate her conception of how values are discovered, Murdoch turns to religion, suggesting that 'faith' should be a component of the moral life. Faith, she contends, is not tied to religious conceptions of the world, nor is it mysterious. Rather, she insists it is a common feature of daily life. Murdoch points out that we continually have faith "in personal relationships, in art, in theoretical studies" and "in a person or idea in order to understand him or it" [Murdoch, 1992, p.393]. She describes the experience of faith as characterised by the feeling that "I intuitively know and grasp more than I can yet explain" [Murdoch, 1992, p.393]. This experience is "something which we can all recognise and which can be illustrated in many different kinds of human activity" [Murdoch, 1992, p.400] and "in learning, loving, creatively imagining, we may be inspired or overcome by a sense of certainty at a particular point" [Murdoch, 1992, p.400]. Murdoch illustrates this experience using the example of the artist who "attends to the dark something out of which he feels certain he can, if he concentrates and waits, elicit his poem, picture, music: it is as if he remembered it or found it waiting for him, veiled but present" [Murdoch, 1992, pp.400-401]. The example of the artist captures her notion of faith – and echos the work of Maritain and his description of the good artist in the last chapter – and she clearly considers the artist's

wait for inspiration as akin to perceiving values. Thus, art, like the moral life, consists of “pure, disciplined, professional speculation” [Murdoch, 1970, p.76] towards that which is real.

Moral values, like many components of life, are grasped, in part, by “faith or intuition” [Murdoch, 1992, p.395]. It is ‘faith’ which enables one to intuit the moral value of the good, even though all that confronts one are particular instances of goodness. Faith is connected to knowledge in that there is “an intimate relation which is not easy to analyse in terms of what is prior to what” [Murdoch, 1992, p.393]. Therefore, in some sense, it seems that faith is knowledge which one has not yet fully systematised or articulated clearly, and is concerned with those things for which language is an inadequate means of expression, such as values and emotions. Murdoch cites Simone Weil, who describes faith as “an orientation of the soul towards something which one does not know, but whose reality one does know” [Murdoch, 1992, p.401]. Faith, then, is part of what constitutes the moral life: faith in the reality of moral values, faith in the reality of the good, and faith that persistence will reveal these values.

4.3.5. Attending to Reality

The difficulty in perceiving reality is so great, and the capacity of humans for self-delusion so immense, that Murdoch suggests tools and techniques which can be used to aid the moral task of seeing reality clearly. Murdoch submits that:

Where strong emotions of sexual love, or of hatred, resentment, or jealousy are concerned, ‘pure will’ can usually achieve little. It is small use telling oneself ‘stop being in love, stop feeling resentment, be just’. What is needed is a re-orientation which will provide an energy of a different kind. [Murdoch, 1970, p.55]

Again, Murdoch looks to religion, and turns to the activity of prayer, which she holds functions as a means by which to re-focus one’s attention upon another object. Prayer is, for Murdoch, “properly not petition, but simply an attention to God” [Murdoch, 1970, p.55], the

“supreme love-object” [Murdoch, 1992, p.83]⁸⁸. In prayer, the individual looks away from the self and towards God. Prayer purifies selfish energy and enables one to step away from the self and see that which is real. Hence, she postulates that “prayer (or something like it) is...essential...and is indeed a vital mediating concept, enabling the liberating discovery of the divine in one’s own soul” [Murdoch, 1992, p.448]. She names this ‘something like prayer’ as ‘attention’. Attention is exactly what the name would suggest. It is simply attention directed away from the self and towards another object. It is a “looking carefully at something and *holding* it before the mind” [Murdoch, 1992, p.3]. For Murdoch, attention is a form of self-discipline in which one consciously refocuses attention away from the self and onto anything that is not the ego. In this sense attention is ‘moral training’ which enables one to approach the real, for we “*grow by looking*” [Murdoch, 1970, p.31]. Attention provides a device for the “purification of states of mind” [Murdoch, 1970, p.83] and improves one’s quality of consciousness, making the recognition of moral values easier. Attention, therefore, supplies a place in the moral realm, just as “there used (with the old God) to be, a place of wisdom and calm to which we can remove ourselves” [Murdoch, 1992, p.249]. The important element is the change in focus, from the self to the other, the “shift...(of)...the centre of the world from ourself to another place” [Murdoch, 1992, p.17]. Attending – the “endeavour to *see*...and attend to what surrounds and concerns us” [Murdoch, 1992, p.218] – is a moral task in itself, for “*how* we see our situation...(is)...already, a moral activity” [Murdoch, 1992, p.315]. Murdoch describes the ability to attend as the “characteristic and proper mark of the active moral agent” [Murdoch, 1970, p.34] because it is the means by which one can come to see reality. Attention, “is part of the process by which we learn the meaning of moral concepts and...it is through attention that we gain knowledge of the individual and of the world” [O’Conner, 1996, p.73].

The object of attention does not need to be an object of a certain sort. Any object will suffice as long as it diverts the attention. Literally anything can be a suitable object of attention: from learning Russian [Murdoch, 1970, p.89], to ‘falling in love’ [Murdoch, 1992, p.16]. In

⁸⁸ A description with which MacLagan would agree.

fact, Murdoch comments that “‘falling in love’...is for many people the most extraordinary and revealing experience of their lives, whereby the centre of significance is suddenly ripped out of the self, and the dreamy ego is shocked into awareness of an entirely separate reality” [Murdoch, 1977, p.36]. However, although any object can serve as a means to unselfing, Murdoch does suggest that some are better than others. Murdoch’s ultimate object of attention is, as one would expect, the good, and her proposed moral improvement is a progress from attention to any object, gradually, by degrees, to the supreme object⁸⁹. If one succeeds in attending to the good then one will achieve “a purification of selfish energy and...an increased capacity for virtue” [O’Conner, 1996, p.120]. Ultimately, then, the goal is gradually to move one’s attention to the good, and then to use this good energy to change one’s life for the better. Attention is invaluable to the moral task, for “meditation (prayer, attention, with or without God) may enlarge our being by giving power and reality to good impulses” [Murdoch, 1992, p.468]. Therefore, Murdoch is eager to ensure that there is a “place both inside and outside religion for a sort of contemplation of the good...an attention which is not just the planning of particular good actions but an attempt to look right away from the self towards a distant transcendent perfection, a source of uncontaminated energy” [Murdoch, 1970, p.101]. Thus, the better one attends, and the purer one’s object of attention, the more clearly one will see reality. As a result one will be able to make informed choices, for “if we have attended properly, when the moment for decision arrives we have no choice” [O’Conner, 1996, p.68]. For Murdoch, recognising and responding to moral value is a way of life entailing commitment and dedication to the absolute value of the good, and hence is considered by many to be a religious picture.

⁸⁹ This kind of progression is parallel to Plato’s *Phaedrus* – one starts with beauty of the flesh and gradually progresses to the true form of beauty.

4.4. The Role of the Aesthetic in the Moral Life

4.4.1. Art and the Revelation of Reality

As already noted, Murdoch considers that attention may be directed to any object, although she does suggest that certain objects may be better than others. In particular, she emphasises the place of art as a focus of attention. Art objects function well as objects of attention because they not only draw attention away from the self but they can even work actively against illusion, for “good art, not fantasy art, affords us a pure delight in the independent existence of what is excellent...it is a thing totally opposed to selfish obsession” [Murdoch, 1970, p.85]. The creation of art is achieved by the artist attending to reality, and consequently, artworks do not only act as an alternative focus of attention, as any object may do, but they are also, as discussed in the last chapter, transcendent and capable of revealing aspects of reality. Art’s capacity to convey what is real and transcendent leads Murdoch to term it ‘moral training’, because it “teaches us how real things can be looked at and loved without being seized and used” [Murdoch, 1970, p.65]. Consequently, Murdoch argues forcibly for the place of art in the moral quest, declaring that art is “the most educational thing we have, far more so than its rivals, philosophy and theology and science” [Murdoch, 1977, p.86]. This is because art is “an educator and revealer” [Murdoch, 1970, p.65] and helps one to “distinguish what is illusory from what is real” [Murdoch, 1992, p.418]. Thus, art provides a “revelation of reality” [Murdoch, 1977, p.78] and is “able to show what is nearest, what is deeply and obviously true but usually invisible” [Murdoch, 1992, p.90]. Therefore, for Murdoch, “art is not merely a useful analogy for moral goodness. Good art is a special case of good living because it essentially involves a ‘loving attention’ to the real” [Lloyd, 1982, p.63]. It seems then that Murdoch’s contention, echoing various commentators discussed in the previous chapter, is that art not only helps one escape illusions (as any object of attention can do) but offers a vision of that which is real and true.

4.4.2. Transcendence in Art

Art's capacity to reveal the real gives it a special place in the moral quest. Attending to art does not merely draw one away from the self, but draws one to 'something': to what lies behind the artwork, to that which is real. Thus, for Murdoch, "works of art, with or without the intention of the artists, readily acquire for their clients a significance which is 'beyond themselves'" [Murdoch, 1992, p.339], and as a result enable the spectator to "grasp...ideas of transcendence" [Murdoch, 1992, p.339]. Murdoch's claim is not merely that works of art are more than the sum of their makings⁹⁰, but that art takes one 'beyond' the self, and the artwork grants insight into reality itself and therefore leads one to the good. Thus, art offers transcendence, and in contemporary society, with religion being what it is⁹¹, "the art object conveys, in the most accessible and for many the only available form, the idea of a transcendent perfection" [Murdoch, 1992, p.8]. Hence, Murdoch's contention is that:

Good art...provides a stirring image of a pure transcendent value, a steady visible enduring higher good, and perhaps provides for many people, in an unreligious age without prayer or sacraments, their clearest *experience* of something grasped as separate and precious and beneficial. [Murdoch, 1977, pp.76-77]

Similar arguments concerning the ability of art to offer transcendence, as noted in the previous chapter, are not uncommon, and certainly there are many who would accept "art's old natural tendency to 'point beyond'" [Murdoch, 1992, p.5]. However, there are differences in Murdoch's claims since she is not arguing, as Steiner did, that art is simply a conduit to spiritual experience of The Transcendent. Certainly, art does provide a "spiritual experience which is a source of good energy" [Murdoch, 1970, p.69], but this is not made possible by the presence of God. Art, for Murdoch, is not dependent on religion, nor can it replace the role which religion played vis-à-vis morality. The transcendence which art offers is connected at a deep level to both morality and religion, but there is no question of *dependence* – neither morality on religion, as suggested by divine command theorists, nor

⁹⁰ See the two definitions of 'transcendence in art' in Section 3.3. Murdoch would adopt the second of these.

⁹¹ Like O'Hear in Chapter Three, Murdoch sees traditional religions as in decline. For further information on Murdoch's position with regard to religion see Section 4.5.

morality on art, as suggested by O'Hear. Murdoch's conception of the relationship of art to morality is more complex, and at times is a relation of interdependency. In fact, it is misleading to frame the relationship in terms of dependency at all. It is nearer to the truth to say that Murdoch regards art and morality (and as will be discussed later, religion too) as all connected to aspects of reality.

It is this capacity of art to reveal the real, to show the "absolute pointlessness of virtue while exhibiting its supreme importance" [Murdoch, 1970, p.86], which Murdoch suggests is proof of her realist formulation. Her claim is that in showing the real, art reveals and confirms the presence of the good. The strongest statement of this thesis is made in *The Sovereignty of Good*, in which she states that art supports her depiction of the good and for 'proof' of her thesis she would "rely especially upon arguments from experience concerned with the realism which we perceive to be connected with goodness and with the love and detachment which is exhibited in great art" [Murdoch, 1970, p.75]. Exactly why the spectator or artist would, in the experience of art, come to recognise the reality of the good is not spelt out. However, various solutions suggest themselves. One solution is to assume that because art reveals reality it thereby uncovers the good. Alternatively, it could be the case that in art one encounters the value of beauty which leads to the knowledge of other values⁹², most notably of the good.

4.4.3. Beauty

Murdoch's attitude towards beauty, as one would expect, is Platonic, in that beauty and goodness are connected⁹³ to the extent that, at times, beauty is seen as an aspect of goodness. The description of beauty as a transcendental, given by Maritain in the last chapter, is not dissimilar to the Platonic line which Murdoch adopts. Like Maritain's transcendentals, Murdoch holds that beauty and goodness are present in all things, and though they can be seen in concrete instances they are not contained in these instances. Following Plato,

⁹² As outlined in Chapter Three.

⁹³ For Plato, beauty is "the only spiritual thing we love immediately by nature" [Baldanza, 1974, p.27]. Beauty, like goodness, is a true form, and for Maritain a transcendental.

Murdoch maintains that beauty is the only ‘form’, or ‘transcendental’ to use Maritain’s terminology, which one can perceive with the senses. Hence, beauty is the easiest value to apprehend. Beauty, recognised by the senses, draws the individual to itself, and through knowledge of beauty one can come to know the good. Unlike Plato, Murdoch contends that beauty is present in the art object, claiming that art is “true and deep in ways which are internally connected with its beauty” [Murdoch, 1992, p.418] and that there is an “apprehension of beauty in art” [Murdoch, 1970, p.69]. Therefore, one could surmise that it is the presence of beauty which makes art a natural focus for attention and allows it to function as an “analogon of moral good” [Murdoch, 1992, p.418]. The connection of beauty to goodness is a clear signal of the relationship between morality and art. Murdoch’s description of art as an analogon of moral goodness suggests that art and moral value should be thought of as components of the same enterprise: the enterprise of perceiving reality.

4.4.4. The Danger of Illusion in Art

However, despite these high claims for art, as we noted in the last chapter, it has also been widely held that art has the capacity, not, as Murdoch asserts, to convey what is real, but rather, to draw one into illusion and fantasy. Art has been denounced as ‘deceiver’ just as vehemently as Murdoch hails it a ‘truth-teller’, and in this debate Murdoch and Plato are on opposing sides. This is the one issue upon which Murdoch radically departs from Plato’s philosophy and advocates an opposing position.

As noted in the previous chapter, Plato not only denies that art shows what is real, but he fundamentally rejects the assertion that art is connected to beauty. In fact, Plato’s main criticism of art stems from his fear that art imitates beauty. Plato condemned art for this pretence, arguing that art “deludes even the decent man by giving him a false self-knowledge...(and)...thus prevents the salvation of the whole man by offering a pseudo-spirituality” [Murdoch, 1977, p.66]. He accuses art of offering a “misleading...‘spiritual’ way” [Murdoch, 1977, p.70], which is ultimately nothing more than “pleasure-seeking, self-satisfied...pseudo-enlightenment” [Murdoch, 1977, p.43]. Plato regards this pseudo-

spirituality and pseudo-enlightenment as the greatest danger, as it promises a “magical substitute” [Murdoch, 1977, p.67] for real striving. In this manner, instead of aiding the moral quest, in art “the pull of the transcendent as reality and good is confused and mimicked” [Murdoch, 1977, p.66]. Consequently, Plato “practically defines it...(i.e. beauty)...so as to exclude art” [Murdoch, 1977, p.2] as he “wants to keep morality ‘safe’ from art” [Murdoch, 1992, p.9].

Murdoch is not immune to these criticisms of art, and despite her adulation for what art is capable of, she recognises that much of art is consoling fantasy, and that “even great art can be a potent source of illusion” [Murdoch, 1992, p.9]. At times she goes as far as to doubt her own thinking about art, and she cries “how *can* art tell truth, how can it not lie a little so as to console, even to convince?” [Murdoch, 1992, p.142]. Murdoch’s solution is to acknowledge that art can lead one into illusion in that “art is...jauntily at home with evil and quick to beautify it” [Murdoch, 1977, p.82] and, at the same time to assert that it is possible for art to lead one to what is real and, in the highest instance, through a vision of beauty to the good itself. Thus, art is double-sided: “trapped between egoistic *fantasy*, and *imagination* as a faculty of transcendence” [Murdoch, 1992, p.86]. To accommodate this dual nature of art, Murdoch follows the theorists of the last chapter, dividing art into good or great art and bad or mediocre art. Great art is truth-telling, educational, revealing and the gateway to transcendence, while bad art is fantasy and subject to all Plato’s criticisms. However, as discussed in the last chapter, there are difficulties in making such a division.

In Murdoch’s case, the difficulties are compounded by the fact that she does not offer any criteria by which to distinguish between good art and mediocre art, other than the fact that great art fulfils the functions outlined. Such a solution negates the force of Plato’s criticism that art masquerades as beauty; that it fools one into believing that that which is true, real and transcendent is known. Moreover, if great art is simply that which fulfils the roles she suggests, then she is in danger of producing a circular argument. Murdoch does not account for why great art really does contain beauty rather than just appears to contain beauty – a problem which only arises after one has first found a satisfactory example of what ‘great art’

is. Murdoch's failure to supply firm criteria makes analysis of her argument difficult. The only examples she proffers are a small number of works of art from the 'classical canon', such as Shakespeare's *King Lear*. However, she makes it clear that not only are great works of art not limited to the classical canon, but in addition many works that do appear in it do not qualify, under her definition, to be great art. All of which goes to make determining the nature, and thus validity, of her claims for great art still more difficult.

Moreover, because Murdoch is only concerned with art's ability to convey reality she neglects many other varieties and capacities of art. For example, many praise the capacity for art to act as fantasy and help one to escape, to be taken out of oneself not in order to see the truth, but simply to relax and unwind. Capacities such as this are greatly valued by many, but not accounted for by Murdoch's thesis. Such issues are never adequately resolved in Murdoch's writing. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Murdoch's primary focus is moral, and she is interested in art as it fits into the moral quest rather than aesthetic theory at large. Thus, while one can find examples of art which fulfil the roles she envisages in one's own experience, it is harder to discern a means by which such choices can be defended other than on purely subjective grounds.

In sum, then, for Murdoch, despite the eminent place which art holds in the moral quest, and the ways in which it can lead one to the good, one must be wary of art and constantly be on one's guard against being led further into illusion. However, this said, the importance of art – both as a provider of good objects of attention, and, crucially, as a carrier of transcendence which reveals reality, beauty, and goodness – cannot be underestimated. The significance which Murdoch allots to art leads Kerr to describe art and morality as “two aspects of a single struggle – the struggle of the human subject to see whatever it may be *justly*” [Kerr, 1997, p.81].

4.4.5. The use of Imagination and Images

Not only is art important for Murdoch as an object of attention and as a fundamental gateway to the real, but art is also connected to imagination. Murdoch's assertion that "the world is not given to us 'on a plate', it is given to us as a creative task" [Murdoch, 1992, p.215], leads her to allot imagination a prominent role in the moral enterprise. At this point, in the context of imagination, art reappears as part of the "continuous breeding of imagery in the consciousness which is...a function of moral change" [Murdoch, 1992, p.329]. Murdoch argues that art can aid the moral quest by providing a moral playground in which one can experience moral situations. In particular, Murdoch points to fiction, declaring that "good novels concern the fight between good and evil and the pilgrimage from appearance to reality" [Murdoch, 1992, p.97]. By placing oneself within the novel one can imaginatively interact with the characters and experience morally important situations. In this sense she terms novels 'moral training grounds' in that "we read great novels with all our knowledge of life engaged, the experience is cognitive and moral in the highest degree" [Murdoch, 1992, p.97]. Art used in this manner is a "great hall of reflection where...everything under the sun can be examined and considered" [Murdoch, 1977, p.86]; the plight of the characters is meditated upon and their thoughts and actions judged according to one's own moral sensibilities. Murdoch suggests that literature is particularly suited to aiding moral growth as it "abounds in, one might almost say consists of, value judgements" [Murdoch, 1992, p.91]. This engagement with moral values, imbedded in the fabric of artworks, Murdoch holds to be "part of our general moral enterprise" [Murdoch, 1992, p.99]. Murdoch sees such exploration as contributing to the moral quest, and she suggests that "imagination is here a moral discipline" [Murdoch, 1992, p.322]. Consequently, imagination functions as part of the mechanism of moral change. The imagination allows the moral agent to picture the kind of person he wishes to be, and by creating his own personal ideal he has an image to work towards which helps to supply the impetus for moral change.

Imagination and images are thus essential to Murdoch's picture, a notion which again can be traced to Plato. Images are not only helpful, but appear to be necessary tools for the moral

undertaking – which is a creative and personal journey – although the possibility of subjectivity is negated by the ever-present objective good. Images, she suggests, should be used, but only as images, and then they must be discarded; they must never become controlling images. It is this sense of imagination and creativity which gives the moral life the element of questing. The moral life is not about obeying certain rules but is about the whole person. Thus one must:

work, using or failing to use our honesty, our courage, our truthful imagination, at the interpretation of what is present to us, as we of necessity shape it and ‘make something of it’. We help it to be. We work at the meeting point where we deal with a world which is other than ourselves. [Murdoch, 1992, p.215]

The use of imagination in such a way raises questions with regard to Murdoch’s insistence that human beings are image-ridden and need to escape from illusion. Allotting such an important place to the imagination appears to be giving the ego free rein to create a fantasy world which would seem to counteract the endeavour to see the real. Murdoch does not address this possible contradiction, and one assumes that her answer would be that one must imagine around that which one knows is real. Certainly, it would be naive to equate imagination with fantasy, and clearly imagination can free one from the self and, as Murdoch’s own example of the mother-in-law shows, lead one to what is real. Therefore, it would be wrong to present imagination as opposed to reality. Thus, although Murdoch would no doubt accept that bad imagination, just like bad art, is fantasy, she would counter that in service of the real both have an unequalled capacity to lead one to reality and so to the good.

Imagination and images, like attention, have an important role to play in achieving moral improvement and arriving at a more honest perception. This is a fact which is revealed by Murdoch’s reliance upon Plato’s myth of the cave. Murdoch deems Plato’s cave to be one of the most useful and illuminating images of the moral life, indeed “at the heart of Murdoch’s Platonism is her recasting of the allegory of the cave” [Jones, 1992, p.688]. The image of the cave is understood by Murdoch as “a series of iconoclasms and demythologisations”

[Conradi, 1986, p.219]. The progression of the pilgrim towards the sun, is for Murdoch, the best representation we have of the moral life. In the image of the sun one can see the fundamental, yet distant, force of the good which draws the pilgrim towards that which is real, and in the fire and the cave the snares of the ego are pictorially represented. Escaping illusion and heading out into the light of the sun, is, as Murdoch insists, a long and difficult ascent, but though distant and obscured, the sun, that is the good, is real and knowable. The cave also shows that there are levels of reality or truth: at lower levels one perceives inklings of the good which serve to lead one to higher levels.

4.5. Religion and the Moral Life

Murdoch's allegiance to the cave feeds her conception of morality as a pilgrimage, a notion which is most often identified with religion. Indeed, the religious life is a source of insight, for like her conception of the moral life, it relies upon images as inspirational guides. Yet, although Murdoch regards the religious life as a source of illumination, she also holds religion to be a consoling illusion, in fact, the ultimate consoling illusion. However, while recognising this danger and retaining a wariness of certain forms of religion, she remains interested in religion and indeed describes herself as a "neo-Christian or Buddhist Christian or Christian fellow traveller" [Murdoch, 1992, p.419]. Not only does Murdoch examine religious thoughts and practices for elements which can be extrapolated to the moral sphere – like the use of images and the practice of 'attention' as a secular version of prayer – but in addition she postulates that a spiritual⁹⁴ or religious element is an essential part of the moral life.

⁹⁴ Using the term 'spiritual' is always a dangerous move in theology today, as it seems to mean whatever the author intends. However, in this instance it seems the most appropriate term as Murdoch is not strictly talking about religion in that she thinks it can be applied to the moral life by those who do not 'believe' in a traditional religious sense. Therefore, despite the difficulty in using this term, there are occasions on which it is used to signify the sense of transcendence, of sacredness and of ultimate commitment.

4.5.1. Decline of Traditional Religion

Murdoch reads the contemporary Western situation as one in which “religion is disappearing” [Murdoch, 1992, p.307], so much so that even religious-minded people have difficulty in ‘finding’ God; a view she supports with the work of Martin Buber, who observes that the “God who formerly spoke to us is dumb” [Murdoch, 1992, p.465]. Consequently, she argues that our society is one in which “‘facts’ proliferate, values fade, religion fades, our sense of truth is shaken. A confidence and a certainty, some might say a baseless optimism, carried for us by religion and art, seems no longer present” [Murdoch, 1992, p.372]. Thus, she argues that “traditional supernatural religious beliefs fade, and seem to be *inevitably* superseded by scientific and technological modes and conceptions of human existence” [Murdoch, 1992, p.426].

The decline of religion, Murdoch maintains, has too often been seen as synonymous with a necessary decline in a realist conception of moral value, for “belief in a personal God seemed a prime guarantee of general morality” [Murdoch, 1992, p.81]. She recognises that “with the decline of religious observance and religious ‘consciousness’...some aspects of moral conduct may decline also” [Murdoch, 1992, p.488]. Yet, these for Murdoch are the aspects of religion which are threatening to true morality, and she observes that “thinkers...have held, often rightly, that organised and institutionalised religion is an enemy of morality, an enemy of freedom and free thought, guilty of cruelty and repression” [Murdoch, 1992, p.487]. Thus, she accepts the humanist critique⁹⁵ and asserts that moral action must be ‘for nothing’. But she does not accept that the only alternative to a traditional religious view of moral value is to adopt the kind of philosophical theory outlined at the beginning of this chapter. In other words, the failure of traditional religion does not mean that one should endorse a “more ‘reasonable’, ordinary, *available* relativism and ‘naturalism’” [Murdoch, 1992, p.488]. There is, for Murdoch, a middle ground.

⁹⁵ See Section 2.4.

Her contention is that traditional religions are disappearing, but a religious quality of attitude can and must be preserved. As we have seen, she advocates religious practices such as attention (prayer). However, the place of religion in her philosophy is more than merely adopting similar practices. Murdoch considers that morality in some sense needs religion, for “high morality without religion is too abstract, high morality craves for religion” [Murdoch, 1992, p.484]. Thus, in a similar manner to her claims for commonality in the aesthetic and moral sphere, she decrees that “any...distinction between religion and morals, whether offered to protect one or the other, tends to be somewhat general and unrealistic” [Murdoch, 1992, p.336]. Consequently, she suggests that the concept of religion is ‘enlarged’ to include ways of life which are religious in quality, but not religious in any traditional sense. Broadening the definition of religion, she believes, will allow the moral life to be deemed religious when lived in a certain way. Indeed, she postulates that without a religious element one will not be able to perceive moral values fully. A religious approach to life encourages one to view life holistically and not as a series of compartmentalised moral judgements. Thus, she states that religion “symbolises high moral ideals which then travel with us and are more intimately and accessibly effective than the unadorned promptings of reason” [Murdoch, 1992, p.484].

4.5.2. A Godless Religion

Such reasoning leads Murdoch to assert that “moral philosophy must include this...(religious)...dimension whether we call it religion or not” [Murdoch, 1992, p.481]. Hence, she wishes to reintroduce a spiritual element into moral philosophy, and to “arrive at some clearer view of a Godless religion” [Murdoch, 1992, p.425]. By this Murdoch means not a belief system, but an attitude to life which is spiritual in character. Her concept of religion she describes in *Acastos*, declaring that “religion is having an intense attitude and no time off”, it is “about all those awful deep things” [Murdoch, 1987, p.86]. She wishes to endorse such a religion, and thus, her intention is to create a “theology which can continue without God” [Murdoch, 1992, p.511]. This godless religion or theology is essentially moral philosophy, and indeed she insists that her “whole argument can be read as moral

philosophy” [Murdoch, 1992, p.481]. Her aim is to sustain the sense of significance and importance with which religion imbued moral value, not to endorse “a particular dogma or mode of faith and worship” [Murdoch, 1992, p.336]. She is not looking for religious authority because she clearly conceives of moral values having authority within themselves. What she is looking for is a continued sense of profundity which, for her, appears to be tied up with a religious attitude to the world. Thus, her endeavour is to present an alternative both to traditional religion and to the philosophies outlined at the beginning of this chapter. She proffers, “a vision of the sovereignty of the form of the good as offering the only salvation for a society as sick as ours – if we could learn to practice a certain self-discipline and spiritual asceticism” [Kerr, 1997, p.72].

Murdoch believes that if one adopts a realist position with regard to the good, then even though traditional religious beliefs are rejected, a religious attitude may survive. She postulates that conceiving of the good in such a manner may offer a solution for “those who do not want to save the traditional God, but want religion to continue, in a way not unconnected to its past, as an assertion of an absolute (necessary) moral claim upon humanity” [Murdoch, 1992, p.418]. Murdoch’s godless religion would safeguard a framework within which one could understand and have a means to express “matters of ‘ultimate concern’, our experience of the unconditioned and our continued sense of what is holy” [Murdoch, 1992, p.512].

Moral value is the focus of her ‘godless religion’, the content of which is “an ultimate religious ‘belief’...that even if all ‘religions’ were to blow away like mist, the necessity and virtue and the reality of the good would remain” [Murdoch, 1992, p.428]⁹⁶. Murdoch’s starting point (and end point) is moral value, maintaining that morality and religion are connected. Thus, the religious position which she advocates must “concern the absolute in a specifically moral way” [Murdoch, 1992, p.140], for what “morality at its best has in common with religion is the conception of an absolute requirement, which is connected with

⁹⁶ The necessity of value and goodness will be discussed in detail later in the chapter when the nature and status of the good and her ontological proof for its existence are explored.

the conception of an absolute basis, the idea of a necessary existing reality” [Kaaikoski, 1997, p.150]. Murdoch describes her hypothesis thus:

‘The absolute’ may be thought of as a distant moral goal, like a temple at the end of a pilgrimage, a condition of perfection glimpsed but never reached. Or of course it may be thought of as being, or being the property of, a personal God. But the idea of absolute, as truth and certainty, is contained in ordinary exercises of cognition, it is already inherent in the knowledge which suggests our duty, it is *in* our sense of truth; however feeble or ‘specialised’ our response to it may be. Our justifications of our moral failures pay it homage. It should not be seen as a dangerous possibly heteronomous property of religion (or a kind of transcendent ‘thing’), but as something innate in morality which can also bind or connect morality with a certain understanding of religion. [Murdoch, 1992, p.304]

Hence, Murdoch does not think she is proposing anything unique or complex. Rather, she is allotting to moral value its proper status which has been hidden inside traditional religion. However, what must not be forgotten when discussing Murdoch’s philosophy is that though she does claim that moral value underlies traditional religion, what underlies moral value is the sovereign good. Therefore, the ground of Murdoch’s morality, or new religion, is the good which is absolute and objective, and which ensures the reality of other moral values.

4.5.3. The Methodology of Demythologisation

In order to achieve a such a religion, Murdoch advocates a radical demythologisation of existing religions. She maintains that “religion involving supernatural beliefs (in a literal after-life etc.) was always partly a kind of illusion, and... we are now being forced by an inevitable sophistication to have a demythologised religion or none at all” [Murdoch, 1992, p.431]. Thus, she is convinced that it is time to “say goodbye to the old literal, personal, ‘elsewhere’ God” [Murdoch, 1992, p.420] and to strip religion of all which makes would-be believers declare “Religion just *isn’t true*” [Murdoch, 1992, p.484]. Such an undertaking is not unprecedented, because “morality has always been connected with religion and religion with mysticism” [Murdoch, 1970, p.74]. Thus, she suggests that in removing ‘religion’ from

the equation, morality can be in direct contact with mysticism, resulting in a mystical morality which has no supernatural element.

Murdoch does not reject traditional religions out of hand, and she suggests that they contain aspects of truth hidden amongst and behind the images. However, she comments that too often the images of religion have been taken as the truth itself rather than pointers towards it. She cites Buddhism as the religion which comes closest to her conception of a demythologised religion because, in her view, Buddhists use stories and myths in a non-literal manner. Christianity is further from her goal because, while she accepts that some believers use the Christian symbols as enlightening guides, she suspects that most believers perceive Christian imagery not as means to approach what is real and true, but as that which is real and true itself (indeed many, even most, believers would declare that the imagery is literally rather than metaphorically true). She holds out the hope that it is possible to change the common understanding of the Christ figure into a more Buddha-like character, arguing that a "Buddhist-style survival of Christianity could preserve tradition, renewing religious inspiration and observance in a vision of Christ as a live spiritual symbol" [Murdoch, 1992, p.137]. In a demythologised Christianity, God and Christ would be thought of not as 'real' 'existing' beings, but as symbols which point towards the reality of moral value. Hence, Murdoch holds traditional religion to be a foil for moral value, which makes the recognition of values easier for incarnate personal beings. A conclusion which is supported by various assertions, including her notion that it is possible to "look through this Christ into the mystery of good" [Murdoch, 1992, p.429]. In order for Christianity to achieve her aim, Christ must lose his historical significance and become only metaphorically the son of a metaphorical God; "the Christ who saves us is the mystical Christ whom we make our own, whose figure is a mixture of essence and accident, partly a creation of art as well as being compact of everything we know about goodness" [Murdoch, 1992, p.429]. Literal interpretations of religion Murdoch deems false and, if adopted, dangerous to the moral life. However, the demythologised religion with which Murdoch is left is so different from traditional religion that she wonders whether it can "still be called religion" [Murdoch, 1992,

p.303]. Indeed, she has been accused not only of detaching morality from theism, but also of detaching religion from theism⁹⁷. Nonetheless, she insists that religion must be conceived of in the way she suggests or it will be nothing more than delusion and fantasy. Images, including religious images, though necessary tools along the path towards the true and the good, must always be partial. They must never become the end of the quest itself, as is invariably the case and the ever-present danger in traditional religion. In her vision, images must be used and then discarded, just as “Plato in his mature years, and the author of the *Seventh Letter*, might agree that the mythical and metaphorical imagery of the central dialogues could be regarded, by those able to understand them, as ladders to be thrown away after use” [Murdoch, 1993, p.318]. Achieving the end of the quest, and seeing the real without the cipher of images, is difficult, though not impossible, and Murdoch points to certain mystics whose “knowledge of the divine and practice of the selfless life has transcended the level of idols and images” [Murdoch, 1992, p.73]

In sum, then, her demythologised religion must be “about the deepest things, it must be *true*, and also comprehensible, or ambiguous, enough to be appropriated by all sorts of individuals” [Murdoch, 1992, p.98]. To fulfil these criteria it must struggle to continue to be truthful, and in this attempt should focus on moral value and continually return to the “‘deep’ human reality upon which both religion and morality rest” [Murdoch, 1992, p.425]. Perhaps the clearest glimpse of Murdoch’s idea of religion is given in her fictional Platonic dialogue, *Acastos*, in which her Plato describes religion:

It’s got to be necessary, it’s got to be certain, it’s got to be proved by the whole of life, it’s got to be the magnetic centre of everything...religion is above the gods, it *can’t* be gods, but that doesn’t mean it’s anything we happen to think, it doesn’t mean *we’re* the gods, that’s just the *opposite*, it’s beyond us, more real than us, we have to come to it and let it change us, religion is spiritual change, *absolute* spiritual change. [Murdoch, 1987, pp.98-99]

⁹⁷ See Antonaccio, 1996, p.230.

In essence, Murdoch believes that a religious element which is manifested in devotion and commitment to seeing reality and moving towards the good, is an essential part of a moral theory. In order for this to happen she suggests constant attention towards the good. Thus, she is suggesting a 'new religion' which is grounded in a belief not in God, but in the realism of the good.

4.6. The Good

Having outlined Murdoch's vision of moral life we now return to her realist conception of moral values and in particular to her central value, the good.

Murdoch's philosophy is formulated around the fundamental concept of the good. The good is the supreme object of attention, the focus of Murdoch's godless religion and the end point of the moral quest. Consequently, the validity of her schema depends largely upon one's judgement about this sovereign concept. However, adjudging the status and nature of Murdoch's good is not an easy task, because the "unsystematic presentation of her ideas and the difficulty of the issues being considered make it hard to be sure what she means by the Good" [Burns, 1997, p.303]⁹⁸. Furthermore, Murdoch's continual insistence that recognising the real and true is exceptionally difficult suggests that illusion may obscure the good. Correctly perceiving the good is the end point of the moral quest, and by virtue of the fact that the struggle to see the good is a lifetime's endeavour, the possibly of satisfactorily defining the good is fraught with difficulty.

However, a necessary aspect of Murdoch's moral schema is that one can always have some sense of goodness, however imperfect:

The authority of the Good seems to us something necessary because the realism (ability to perceive reality) required for goodness is a kind of intellectual ability to perceive what is true...*The necessity of the good is then an aspect of the kind of necessity involved in any technique of exhibiting fact.* [Murdoch, 1970, p.66]

⁹⁸ As noted in the introduction of this chapter, the ordering and systematic presentation of Murdoch's work is no small feat.

Therefore, even if one's grasp of the good is imperfect, it must be possible, at least partially, to describe the good. If it were not, it would be difficult to see how it might play such an overwhelming role in ordinary experience. Accordingly, there are certain aspects of which Murdoch is certain.

4.6.1. Transcendence and Immanence

The fundamental qualities of the good are that it is both transcendent and immanent. For Murdoch, the good "lives as it were on both sides of the barrier and we can combine the aspiration to complete goodness with a realistic sense of achievement within our limitations" [Murdoch, 1970, p.93]. Murdoch maintains that there is no contradiction in recognising the good as both immanent and transcendent because plainly the "idea of good, perceived in our confused reality, also transcends it" [Murdoch, 1992, p.405].

Murdoch uses the term transcendent, as Maritain did with regard to beauty, in the Aristotelian sense, viz. that of transcending the categories. Good is transcendent in that it is never contained in a single object or action which one would describe as good, but always exceeds the confines of a particular situation. For Murdoch, the good is part of the "fundamental texture of human nature" [Murdoch, 1992, p.474], and although part of the human experience, this "inexhaustible reality" [Murdoch, 1970, p.42] surpasses it. It is the "ideal end-point" [Murdoch, 1970, p.42]. 'Transcendent', as employed by Murdoch, does not have supernatural connotations, in that the good is not other-worldly, or dependent upon any 'thing' or 'being' outside the human world. Rather, it is a reality in the world and transcendence describes part of its nature.

Simultaneously, Murdoch insists that the good has an immanent aspect. It is through this immanent aspect that the good itself is known, and she postulates that the "idea of good (goodness, virtue) crystallises out of our moral activity" [Murdoch, 1992, p.426]. In other words, a partial recognition of the good itself is contained within the experience of goodness in ordinary life. For Murdoch, then, knowledge of the good and inklings of its transcendent

nature are not unusual concepts but simply arise from moral experience, for though the good “can be neither seen nor possessed it is perceptible in instances of moral behaviour” [O’Conner, 1996, p.120]. Thus, the “all-important knowledge of good and evil is learnt in every kind of human activity” [Murdoch, 1992, p.418].

These two characteristics are the most significant aspects of Murdoch’s good, and her definition of these terms differentiates her realism from other philosophies previously discussed. Murdoch denies that transcendence and immanence are opposites, maintaining that any such dichotomy is false. She holds that transcendence and immanence are not mutually exclusive but connected, although the terms are used to highlight different aspects. For her transcendence begins in immanence, otherwise it would not be perceptible to finite humans, as it is transcendence which gives particulars authority and meaning. Thus, the good is “an idea, an ideal, yet it is also evidently and actively incarnate all around us” [Murdoch, 1992, p.478]. Hence, the two aspects of the good flow into each other; the transcendent is recognised in its immanent aspects for “what is fundamental here is ideal or transcendent, never fully realised or analysed, but continually rediscovered in the course of the daily struggle with the world” [Murdoch, 1992, p.427]. To illustrate her concept of the good as both immanent and transcendent, Murdoch refers to Plato’s picture of the cave. In Plato’s imagery the good is “unique, it is ‘above being’” and yet “it fosters our sense of reality, as the sun fosters life on earth” [Murdoch, 1992, p.399]. Hence, the good, like the sun, is ‘beyond’ and transcendent, but it can be seen and known in part on an immanent level, just as the sun has influence and can be known in part from its effects. Thus, in effect Murdoch uses the terms transcendent and immanent in order to signify the way in which an absolute concept like the good can have relevance for finite beings like ourselves.

This dual nature of the good is integral to Murdoch’s thesis, and from understanding this it is possible to gain a fair insight into its qualities. However, such a definition, though providing a content for the good, does not convince the reader of its reality. Murdoch backs her claim for the reality of the good using two main arguments: an argument from perfection and her own version of the ontological argument. These arguments go some way to setting out a

philosophical defence for her position. However, it is clear from the corpus of her work that ultimately she believes that the fundamental support of her thesis is found in examining one's own experience. Therefore, her use of the argument from perfection and the ontological argument are in some sense 'after the fact'; they are ways of philosophically articulating what she holds to be already known.

4.6.2. The Argument from Perfection

Murdoch's argument from perfection revolves around the meaning of the term 'perfection', which clearly presents the relation between the immanent and transcendent elements of the good. Murdoch asserts that 'perfect' is a comparable term and can only be used in contrast with that which is imperfect⁹⁹. That which is truly perfect is never attainable by finite beings, such as ourselves, and hence perfection is always an ideal. However, though unattainable, the concept of perfection enables one "to see that A...is really better than B" [Murdoch, 1970, p.62]. The comparative nature of the term means that one can judge between actions and objects, for "we learn of perfection and imperfection through our ability to understand what we see as an image or shadow of something better which we cannot yet see" [Murdoch, 1992, p.405]. This ability to contrast and compare means that it is possible to intuit what is not already visible, in that "we *know* of perfection as we look upon what is imperfect" [Murdoch, 1992, p.427]. By extension, the good is known when one looks upon what is not good.

Murdoch's claim, then, is that though human beings cannot know perfection, they do know in which 'direction' it lies; something which is deduced from imperfect objects. This knowledge is immediate in that "we are not usually in doubt about the direction in which good lies" [Murdoch, 1970, p.97]. It is the concept of 'direction' towards that which is perfect which suggests that the good is real, because it is from recognising imperfect

⁹⁹ It may be suggested that the word perfect is used in ordinary language simply as a description, without any consciousness that the object/person is not perfect in the fullest sense (absolutely entirely flawless and complete). However, this argument is peripheral to Murdoch's case for if the speaker reflected on the term he would see that if the term were used correctly it is comparative, and Murdoch's argument has validity.

instances of goodness that the reality of the perfect good is revealed. This transcending order of perfection is for Murdoch “*characteristic of morality*” [Murdoch, 1992, p.427], for it is only in the light of perfection – which for Murdoch means what is perfectly good – that ‘better’ alternatives can be judged. Because perfection is not attainable, but always lies beyond and transcends a particular instance, it provides an ideal, a standard against which particulars can be assessed. Thus, knowing of perfection, which cannot be seen, provides inspiration and knowledge, for “the idea of perfection moves and changes us...because it inspires love” [Murdoch, 1970, p.62]. Therefore, although perfection is “beyond...it exercises its *authority*” [Murdoch, 1970, p.62]. This notion of ‘direction’ and degrees of perfection means that:

Consciousness is fundamentally *orientated* towards the good as its ideal. Consciousness discriminates among levels or degrees of goodness as it carries out its evaluative activity; it is *led* to seek true goodness through the gradual apprehension of lesser degrees of goodness in its surroundings. [Antonaccio, 1996, p.231]

4.6.3. The Ontological Argument

The second argument Murdoch employs in support of her realist conception of goodness is the ontological argument, which like the argument for perfection is about progressions of goodness.

The ontological argument was first put forward as a proof of the existence of God by St Anselm (1033-1109), and Murdoch reproduces this argument in great detail.

Anselm’s thesis is formulated around his definition of God, namely that God is a “being than which nothing greater can be conceived” [Anselm, 1968a, p.4]. His argument starts with the assertion that even the fool¹⁰⁰ who does not believe in God can understand this definition. If the definition can be understood then God must exist, otherwise any existing being would be greater, contradicting the initial definition. Thus, Anselm’s assertion is that “there is no

¹⁰⁰ The fool being taken from Psalm 14, where the fool says in his heart there is no God.

doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality” [Anselm, 1968a, p.4].

This first form of the argument ran into difficulty immediately and was criticised by Anselm’s contemporary, Gaunilo, who argued that merely because one can conceive of ‘the greatest being’ – a possibility which he questions¹⁰¹ – this does not mean that it exists in reality. To illustrate his point Gaunilo cites the now famous example that imagining a perfect island would not bring it into existence. For Gaunilo to be convinced, he demands some other proof¹⁰².

In response to this criticism Anselm restates his argument, explaining that his conception could only apply to the Supreme Being, because only the Supreme Being ‘necessarily exists’, arguing that “if such a being can be conceived to exist, then necessarily it does exist” [Anselm, 1968b, p.14]. This assertion of necessary existence is connected to the manner in which Anselm argues that the Supreme Being can be conceived of, despite Gaunilo’s doubts. Anselm contends that experience of the Supreme Being is revealed all around, and is especially derived from experience of goodness, for “by ascending from the lesser good to the greater, we can form a considerable notion of a being than which a greater is inconceivable” [Anselm, 1968b, p.24]. Hence, if one starts with an experience of goodness, one can then reason that good would be greater if it had no beginning or end, and it is this eternal concept of goodness which is the Supreme Being.

Anselm’s introduction of ‘necessary existence’ has not satisfied critics, and has been disregarded to the extent that Schopenhauer called it “a charming joke” [Murdoch, 1992, p.392]. Momentously, Kant practically destroyed the validity of the proof with the observation that ‘existence’ is not a predicate, which returns the proof to being susceptible to

¹⁰¹ He argues that one has no means by which to picture a greatest being, because one has no experience of such a being. Thus, though one can imagine the ‘greatest man’, for example, because one has a general idea of ‘man’, one cannot picture the greatest being as one has no experience to draw upon.

¹⁰² See Gaunilo, 1968, p.10.

Gaunilo's first criticism. However, Murdoch along with other scholars¹⁰³ have returned to the proof with a renewed interest.

Murdoch remains unconvinced by Kant's criticism, maintaining that "only the first version is vulnerable to Kant's contention that existence is not a predicate" [Murdoch, 1992, p.404]. Murdoch concedes that Anselm's first formulation "may indeed seem frail, only to be given substance by a belief or faith deriving from another source" [Murdoch, 1992, p.404], and appears as "a specious way of expressing a personal certainty which is already tacitly concealed in its premises" [Murdoch, 1992, p.404]. However, she views the second formulation differently and maintains that the replacement of existence with necessary existence creates a very different argument. She maintains that 'necessary existence' is not an empty concept, and she introduces the work of Norman Malcolm¹⁰⁴ who claims, as Anselm did, that 'God' is different from any other concept. Murdoch suggests, in line with Malcolm's work, that, if God exists then he must have always existed. Hence, if the concept 'God' "is meaningful, if it is not self-contradictory, God exists" [Murdoch, 1992, p.410]. For Murdoch the notion of necessary existence is concerned with what constitutes our notion of 'God', and therefore the "problem, in no trivial way...(is)...one of meaning" [Murdoch, 1992, p.410]. Her contention is that necessary existence is about those elements of human life which are ever-present aspects of experience.

Murdoch contends that God does not fulfil these criteria, and therefore 'necessary existence' cannot be correctly applied to the Christian God. If the term were to be used of God, then God could not be "a particular, a contingent thing, one thing among others; a contingent god might be a great demonic or angelic spirit, but not the being in question" [Murdoch, 1992, p.395]. Consequently, if necessary existence is to be used legitimately of God, then "God is not to be worshipped as an idol or identified with any empirical thing; as is indeed enjoined by the Second Commandment" [Murdoch, 1992, p.395]. This assertion she supports citing

¹⁰³ For example, Malcolm, Hartshorne, Findlay etc.

¹⁰⁴ Malcolm criticises Kant's premise that "if God exists (and it is possible that He does not) then He necessarily exists" [Malcolm, 1968, p.155]. The adoption of this premise, Malcolm argues, negates the true meaning of 'necessity' and presents "a self contradictory position" [Malcolm, 1968, p.155].

Valery, who remarks “with poetic, and spiritual, inspiration in mind...that ‘the proper, unique and perpetual object of thought is that which does not exist’” [Murdoch, 1992, p.401]. Thus, Murdoch reckons that Anselm’s second version of the ontological proof fails not because necessary existence is not a predicate, but because it is wrongly applied to God, for “no empirical contingent being could be the required God and what is ‘necessary’ cannot be God either” [Murdoch, 1992, p.425].

To reinforce her pronouncement that the ontological proof cannot apply to the Christian God (at any rate not about the object it has become), she turns to the work of Findlay¹⁰⁵, who dismisses “forms of religion...(that)...attach a uniquely sacred meaning to existent things” [Findlay, 1968, p.120]. Findlay observes that “there are other frames of mind, to which we should not deny the name ‘religious’, which acquiesce quite readily in the non-existence of their objects” [Findlay, 1968, p.120], an observation which Murdoch would like to apply to her own godless religion. Furthermore, he notes that part of what is attributed to God is the “possession of certain excellencies we cannot possibly conceive away” [Findlay, 1968, p.120]. It is these ‘excellencies’ which Murdoch contends the proof is really about, and she praises Findlay for bringing to light what she believes is the ‘deep meaning’ of the ontological argument, namely that “morality and demythologised religion are concerned with what is absolute, with unconditioned structure, with what cannot be ‘thought away’ out of human life” [Murdoch, 1992, p.412].

4.6.4. The Necessary Existence of the Good

Murdoch’s hypothesis is that necessary existence cannot be applied to God, or to “one empirical phenomenon among others” [Murdoch, 1992, p.412], but that it can be used in relation to the good. Just as Murdoch maintains that religious images are foils for the reality

¹⁰⁵ Incidentally, although Murdoch uses Findlay to support her rejection of any empirical being or object as the focus of the ontological proof, it is worth noting that Findlay takes a very different approach to the ontological argument as a whole. He asserts that “necessity in propositions merely reflects our use of words, the arbitrary conventions of our language...(and)...the Divine Existence could only be a necessary matter if we had made up our minds to speak theistically *whatever the empirical circumstances might turn out to be*” [Findlay, 1968, p.119]. Findlay, like most post-Kantian scholars, rejects necessary existence, seeing it as a trick of words, whereas for Murdoch it is not only real, but essential for establishing the good.

of moral value¹⁰⁶, so too she suggests that in Anselm's proof, "what is in question...is something unique, of which the traditional idea of God was an image or metaphor and to which it has certainly been an effective pointer" [Murdoch, 1992, p.412]. Consequently, her hypothesis is that the proof claims "some uniquely necessary status for moral value as something (uniquely) impossible to be thought away from human experience, and as in a special sense, if conceived of, known as real" [Murdoch, 1992, p.396]. The correct interpretation of Anselm's proof is that it establishes the "necessity and sovereignty of the Good" [Murdoch, 1992, p.425], which is revealed in Anselm's description of how one conceives of God: the 'degrees of goodness' argument¹⁰⁷. Anselm's assertion that "we recognise and identify goodness and *degrees* of good, and are thus able to have the idea of a greatest conceivable good" [Murdoch, 1992, p.395] is similar to Murdoch's own argument from perfection. Thus, although the "*goodness* of God is...lost to view in logical discussions of the Proof" [Murdoch, 1992, p.414], it is this which she holds is at the core of his work. Hence, Murdoch asserts that the proof is really not about God but concerns the existence of goodness, which "must be in at the start and cannot be added later" [Murdoch, 1992, p.395].

In defence of this hypothesis, she also cites the fact that Anselm too argues from experience in his "appeal to our sense of God (Good) as discovered everywhere in the world" [Murdoch, 1992, pp.404-405]. She contends that this argument "emerges...under the pressure of the logical argument" [Murdoch, 1992, p.405], and "experience shows us the uniquely *unavoidable* nature of God (Good or the Categorical Imperative)" [Murdoch, 1992, p.405]. Thus, she asserts that the argument "appeals to our moral understanding" [Murdoch, 1992, p.396] and supports the logical claims for the necessity of moral value. The logical formulation of the proof is an attempt to systematise and philosophically account for what is known in experience, namely that "we can 'think away' material objects from human existence, but not concepts of good, true, and real" [Murdoch, 1992, p.425].

¹⁰⁶ See Section 4.5. on her new religion.

¹⁰⁷ See Section 4.6.3. on Anselm's argument.

4.6.5 Experience as the Ultimate Proof

In her own use of the proof, Murdoch puts great emphasis on this component of the argument, stating that:

Reflection upon our ordinary perceptions of what is valuable, what it is like to seek what is true or just in intellectual or personal situations, or to scrutinise and direct our affections, can thus also lend support to the argument about existence and essence which appeared at first as a kind of logical argument. [Murdoch, 1992, p.398]

As we would expect from her philosophy as a whole, Murdoch maintains that the ultimate ground for the conviction of the reality of goodness is one's own moral experience, and it is from reflection upon this experience that logical proofs emerge. It is experience which tells us of the reality of the good, of "its omnipresence, its purity and separateness from our fallen world, in which its magnetic force is nevertheless everywhere perceptible" [Murdoch, 1992, p.405]. The ontological argument provides a logical articulation of our awareness of the good, an awareness which is not "something unusual, specialised or remote" [Murdoch, 1992, p.398], but part of everyday life. Her use of the ontological argument is an attempt to systematise and reveal in philosophical form the reality of the good.

In sum, then, the ontological argument is about the necessity of the good, and by extension of moral value, which is derived from our "most general perceptions and *experience* of the fundamental and omnipresent (uniquely necessary) nature of moral value, thought of in a Christian context as God" [Murdoch, 1992, p.396]. The proof is a claim about the necessary existence of moral value, which is known in "an orientation between good and evil...(which is)...in a unique sense fundamental and ubiquitous in human life" [Murdoch, 1992, p.402]. Murdoch adopts the proof to uphold her conception of the good because she asserts that it effectively addresses "one of the great problems of metaphysics...to explain the idea of goodness in terms which combine its peculiar purity and separateness (its transcendence) with details of its omnipresent effectiveness in human life" [Murdoch, 1992, p.407]. Thus, she contends that the proof is a logical attempt to articulate "the unique nature of morality"

[Murdoch, 1992, p.428], which for her is characterised by immanence and transcendence. It elucidates her contention that:

what is perfect must exist, that is, what we think of as goodness and perfection, the object of our best thoughts, must be something real, indeed especially and most real, not as contingent accidental reality but as something fundamental, essential and necessary.
[Murdoch, 1992, p.430]

For Murdoch, then, the ontological proof presents her unique realist conception of the good, which is real both in an objective sense and is present on the level of the individual person.

4.6.6. The Good and God

Yet, although Murdoch adopts the ontological argument, she is at pains to stress that she is not wishing to replace God with good. Like God, the good provides “a *single perfect transcendent non-representable and necessary real object of attention*” [Murdoch, 1970, p.55], and in these ways the good is similar. Indeed, Murdoch is adamant that “moral philosophy should attempt to retain a central concept which has all these characteristics” [Murdoch, 1970, p.55]. However, because the good is not an empirical object or a personal being, it is “above the level of gods or God” [Murdoch, 1992, p.475]. Consequently, Murdoch’s good, unlike God, is not a person, and though it inspires and informs the moral life the good is indifferent to human striving. Accordingly, the good does not “play a real consoling and encouraging role” [Murdoch, 1970, p.72]; “God sees us and seeks us, the good does not” [Murdoch, 1992, p.83]. Furthermore, Murdoch contends that because of the impersonal nature of the good it is a better focus for attention, for one must “love the good for nothing” [Murdoch, 1992, p.344]. Unlike a personal God, there can be no ulterior motives for being moral; there can be no hope of reward or fear punishment and the moral life is pure and uncorrupted. Thus, her contention is that “good is not the old God in disguise, but rather what the old God symbolised” [Murdoch, 1992, p.428]. God provided a personality for moral value. Stripping away the personality of God we are left with reality of the good, in the sense that the “good represents the reality of which God is the dream” [Murdoch, 1992, p.496]. Therefore, moral value is at the heart of religion, and it is the good

not God which cannot be thought away from human life. For Murdoch, the good offers a central focus which does not have the disastrous consequences for moral living and communication which, as previously discussed, some ideas of God may.

4.6.7. Hierarchy of Values

Murdoch concentrates upon the realism of the good, but this realism extends to other moral values because all values connect to the good. Again, the influence on Murdoch is Platonic, and like Plato, Murdoch conceives of a hierarchy of values. The good is at the head of the hierarchy. Other moral values, such as truth, beauty and knowledge, are akin to the good, and partake of the good more fully than values lower down the scale. Truth, for example, is “very close to good, closer than, for instance, generosity” [Murdoch, 1992, p.325], generosity being lower in the hierarchy and having less to do with goodness. This hierarchy is not static, but depends on the situation. Thus, values interrelate in a way that Murdoch describes as “porous” [Murdoch, 1992, p.323], in that “if we study one moral concept we soon see it as an aspect of another” [Murdoch, 1992, p.323]. In this manner, then, values are real, ordered and connected, though their exact position in the hierarchy in any given situation depends upon what the relevant features are. The good provides a unity of “a peculiar kind” [Murdoch, 1970, p.94]. It seems that it transcends other values as it transcends particular instances; all values contain, and are bound by, the presence of goodness, yet goodness exceeds all values and lies beyond and behind values, as it does instances. Thus, Murdoch presents the moral scene as “disparate and complex beyond the hopes of any system, yet at the same time the concept of the good stretches through the whole of it and gives it the only kind of shadowy unachieved unity which it can possess” [Murdoch, 1970, p.97]. Her understanding of the relation of moral values arises from experience; “reflection...tends to unify the moral world” [Murdoch, 1970, p.57]. Ultimately, then, the good unites the virtues, for it is “above courage and generosity and all the plural virtues...(and)...is to be seen as unshadowed and separate, a pure source, the principle which creatively relates the virtues to each other in our moral lives” [Murdoch, 1992, p.507]. Therefore, just as the good is real and objective, so too are moral values, and she contends

that “moral terms must be treated as concrete universals” [Murdoch, 1970, p.29]¹⁰⁸. She is perhaps influenced by Hegel’s use of the term as a notion worked out in history, substantiated in different ways at different times. Alternatively, Conradi suggests that in using the term ‘concrete universals’, Murdoch refers to “collections of their...(i.e. values)...material instances” [Conradi, 1986, p.76]. However, such a reading would divorce the transcendent good from other moral values, a move which is not merited as Murdoch speaks of other values as connected to, and as aspects of, the good. It seems more likely that by concrete universals Murdoch means to convey a conception of values which, like the good itself, are transcendent, yet experienced in particular situations; the realism of moral values being derived from their connection to the absolute value of the good.

4.7. Analysis and Conclusion

4.7.1. The Breadth of Murdoch’s Vision

Having looked at Murdoch’s moral philosophy as a whole, and having examined the central concept of the good in some detail, it is now possible to make some comments and criticisms concerning her work.

Ultimately, Murdoch’s philosophy in all its aspects, religious, aesthetic and moral, is built around the central concept of the good. Therefore, whether one is convinced by her hypothesis depends to a large extent on whether or not one accepts her arguments which claim to establish the reality of the good, and by extension, the reality of other moral values. Murdoch’s position is controversial, and though realist, she has much in her philosophy which other realists would reject, particularly her framing of the relationship between morality and religion. The religious nature of the moral life, which is so essential for Murdoch, runs contrary to the general impetus of contemporary philosophy which, as revealed in the work of the realists of the first chapter, is moving towards scientific models. Furthermore, Murdoch’s arguments concerning the nature and status of the good are not as

¹⁰⁸ A term which is difficult to define. Murdoch herself does not expand on this term.

clear as they could be, and even after Murdoch's elucidations, there is still uncertainty about what the good is. This is noted by Mitchell, who exclaims that "Murdoch retains the appeal to a transcendent good, but how it illumines and what it illumines she now leaves unsaid" [Mitchell, 1980, p.69].

However, even if Murdoch's philosophy leaves some unanswered questions, her approach does offer an alternative way forward. In particular, those who have despaired of the narrowing of the field of moral philosophy regard her thesis as a cause for rejoicing. Even if one does not agree with her thesis in its entirety, one can still appreciate the broadening of moral philosophy to include areas which have been neglected for too long, such as the aesthetic and the religious.

4.7.2. The Good: An Object, A Concept?

The primary consideration in assessing Murdoch's philosophy is, of course, the good, and despite exploring the nature of the good it is still elusive. There are many points at which Murdoch describes what appear to be conflicting characteristics. One example is the question of whether or not the good is an object. On the one hand, Murdoch's use of the ontological argument explicitly precludes any possibility that the good is an object – indeed the fact that the good is not an object forms part of her reason for claiming that the proof works for good but not for God. However, on the other hand, she refers to the good as an *object* of attention; the best object of attention no less. Thus, she denies that the good is an object even though she refers to it as such. This apparent contradiction is never addressed by Murdoch, however there are solutions to this dilemma which may be suggested. One explanation may be that Murdoch does not consider that the term 'object of attention', with regard to the good, refers to an 'object' in a material sense at all, a suggestion supported by statements like "in an important sense goodness *must* be an idea" [Murdoch, 1992, p.478]. Perhaps Murdoch regards the good as an object only in the sense that it is the end point of the search for perfection and goodness, and is in the value systems and frameworks by which people live and conceive of the world.

In order to clarify this issue it may be possible to draw insight from religion, a course which seems to be justified given Murdoch's own interest in the subject. In Christianity there is a strong tradition, particularly arising from the mystical strains, that God must not be an object, and negative theology adopts much the same stance towards God as Murdoch does towards the good. For such believers, God is not an object but most certainly does exist. It is not clear how Murdoch would view Christian mystics. Clearly she respects mystics and even suggests that some have succeeded in achieving the end of the quest. However, if Murdoch accepts the validity of such a view of God as a non-object then this threatens the distinction which she has made between God and good. Part of the problem with Murdoch's analysis is that she regards God as an object, and although certain believers may act as if this is the case, viewing God in such a way is explicitly precluded by Christian theology and tradition¹⁰⁹. Not only does Christianity deny that God is an object, but "Christian theologians who are orthodox enough to believe in God as Trinity would have caveats about referring to God as 'a person'" [Kerr, 1997, p.75]. Thus, the established position of Christian theology, and one which arose in part from the same source as Murdoch's own philosophy, Platonism, is that God, no less than Murdoch's good, should not be thought of as 'object'. Such reasoning provides an example of how it is possible to hold that 'something', or some 'entity' – it is difficult to find the correct word as 'thing' suggests object but 'concept' suggests a lack of reality – is both real and not an object. However, the difficulty of using this example is obvious, in that the example of God is precisely that from which Murdoch is attempting to distinguish the good. In fact, many critics take this position and declare that Murdoch has not succeeded in separating the two, but that she has simply replaced God with the good¹¹⁰. Consequently, such critics argue that if Murdoch can make the ontological argument work for good then it can also be made to work for God.

Critics are correct to point out that Murdoch has used a very narrow interpretation of Christianity. Furthermore, given the place she allots to religion and to religious thinking

¹⁰⁹ As noted by Kerr who comments that "her knowledge of medieval theology evidently does not include the standard thesis that God is not to be regarded as an object in any kind" [Kerr, 1997, p.75].

¹¹⁰ By way of example, see Kaalikoski, 1997.

theologians are under-represented in her work. As Jones points out, “despite Murdoch’s recurrent desire to bring theology and philosophy together...only a “demythologised” Christian theology is invited to the table” [Jones, 1992, p.689]¹¹¹. However, Murdoch is not a theologian, but a moral philosopher, and given that her thesis is not concerned with God as such, but with introducing a non-theistic religious or mystical element, this is not entirely surprising. Even though this does not undermine her whole thesis, her lack of familiarity with theologians such as Augustine and Aquinas, and with different schools of thought, such as Christian Platonism, does lead her into error. As a result, she has misconstrued the ways in which God is conceived, and hence has simplified Christian views of God¹¹² almost to the point of caricature. Consequently, Murdoch wrongly describes God as an object, and attributes to believers elements of belief and practice which many would find unacceptable, especially believers at the mystical end of the spectrum. However, although her conception of the Christian God may be naive, there are elements of her criticism which do not disappear when these mistakes are rectified.

There is substance to the claim that Murdoch is only able to differentiate between God and good, because she has not fully taken account of theological conceptions of God. However, although she wrongly conceives of God as an object, her assertion that God is personal is not so easily dismissed. God, though not a person, is certainly ‘personal’, in that God has a character which is interested and intervenes in human affairs. Both good and God are personal in that they have supreme personal relevance for human individuals, though the good is disinterested. The impersonal nature of the good allows it to escape from the criticisms of the ontological argument and rescues moral value from the humanist critique of religious morality. Crucially, good, though active in the human sphere, remains disinterested, and unlike God, does not ‘wish’ certain behaviour and there is no question of punishment or reward. Thus, the impersonal nature of the good ensures that moral action is ‘good for nothing’.

¹¹¹ Murdoch neglects many of the most influential theologians, devoting “more space to Don Cupitt than to Thomas Aquinas” [Jones, 1992, p.689].

¹¹² Something which she most certainly does not do in her novels. For example, in *Nuns and Soldiers* Anne is certainly not a naive believer, and has a non-objective God, but a personal Christ; this may even be Murdoch’s mystical Christ.

4.7.3. Necessary Existence

If it is the case that the good is real without being an object, then we must look at just what the realism of the good consists in. It is clear that for Murdoch the good is not simply an idea, or concept in the mind, although some commentators do hold that Murdoch is making such a claim¹¹³. If Murdoch's good was simply a concept or metaphor then she would not have introduced the ontological argument to support her cause, especially given the controversy which surrounds it, and the fact that necessary existence is generally dismissed out of hand. Therefore, it is justified to assume that Murdoch would not have used the ontological argument if she did not wish to claim ontological status for the good. Nor would she have made her argument more controversial by introducing necessary existence. It seems that in order to do justice to Murdoch's good it is imperative to accept that for her the good does exist in some absolute sense. The alternative is to accuse her of using an ontological argument which she does not intend to be about ontological status.

However, despite recognising that it is indeed Murdoch's intention to claim necessary existence for the good, exactly what this entails is harder to discern. Given the elements which she draws out from Anselm's version (such as the degrees of goodness argument), it seems fair to assume that what she is claiming is that good is an ever-present fact in human life. Indeed the degrees of goodness argument suggests that her claim is for an eternally existing good, which (as noted above¹¹⁴) cannot be thought away from human existence. Thus, by using the term 'necessary existence', she wishes simply to assert that goodness is a constant certainty of the human condition and the enduring factor of the human quest. It seems that she uses this controversial, and to many defunct, notion of necessary existence to show the absolute and fundamental place of the good and moral value. Given that this is the case, one is left wondering if she might have achieved her aim more easily by avoiding Anselm's argument altogether, especially given the contempt in which many philosophers and theologians hold it – regarding it as little more than a word game.

¹¹³ See Kaalikoski, 1997.

¹¹⁴ See quote in Section 4.6.4., from Murdoch, 1992, p.396.

4.7.4. Escaping the Limitations of the Fact/Value Dichotomy

If we accept that the good is, as Murdoch insists, real but not an object, there are still questions which need to be addressed, for example, exactly how can the good be a focus of attention; “how are we to contemplate it? Is it possible to attend to such a nebulous concept?” [Burns, 1997, p.309]. As H. O. Mounce points out, attending to the good is not the easiest notion to comprehend, and he comments that he has some difficulty “with the idea that one’s attention may be turned not simply towards examples of goodness, but towards the good itself” [Mounce, 1972, p.79]. Though it is difficult to describe adequately, Murdoch does envisage that it is possible to contemplate not just acts of goodness, but goodness itself. Her description of how the good is recognised – by observing goodness in concrete situations – suggests that from these partial instances it is possible to develop a picture of what the good would be if it was not limited by the confines of these instances. She envisages that by such a means it is possible to perceive absolute transcendent goodness. It is in this recognition that the religious element of the moral life comes to the fore, in that faith and devotion, in the form of attention, are required. Thus, the relationship between religion and morality at this stage is merged, and the moral quest is in effect a religious quest directed towards the good. However, even if it is granted that this progression enables one to see the good, the question remains as to what exactly the good is; in particular whether or not one can envisage the good without simply imagining an ideal of one’s own creation. Clearly, creativity and imagination play a part, but the good is not a personal ideal but an absolute reality.

Part of the difficulty which Murdoch has in convincing her readers of the reality of the good, which is not an object, lies in the fact that she is moving in unusual territory for contemporary philosophy. The idea of the good which Murdoch espouses sounds more mystical than philosophical. Indeed, the reason why many philosophers reject Murdoch’s thesis, or aspects of it, often seems to stem from an unease with the fields in which she moves and the concepts with which she deals (although philosophers of previous times regarded such areas as at the centre of philosophy). In support of her realism, Murdoch

invokes unverifiable, non-scientific concepts, and relies upon what many would describe as unreliable evidence. However, such evidence is only regarded as 'unreliable' if one forces scientific criteria upon philosophical concepts. Murdoch rejects this tendency, and her move away from the dry and narrow world of today's moral philosophy should come as no surprise, given that it is upon such grounds that she criticises other philosophies¹¹⁵. The reasons Murdoch cites for holding such a position is that the attempt to be pseudo-scientific has made it impossible for philosophy to discuss and represent ordinary life satisfactorily. Moreover, Murdoch's philosophy is prescriptive and as such flouts the post-Wittgensteinian assertion that philosophy should only describe the world. In order to comprehend her thesis, one must step outside the confines of the contemporary debate. For Murdoch, arguments about values being queer entities are based upon a misguided premise, namely, that values and facts are fundamentally different and that only facts are real. If it were the case that knowledge is limited to facts, as suggested by the fact/value dichotomy, then it would be impossible to include moral value in the realist side of the equation. Murdoch regards any attempt to treat value according to such criteria as flawed, and the picture of life which arises from such a philosophy as distorted. Hence, she maintains that life is far more complex than a pseudo-scientific picture suggests. Human life cannot be neatly compartmentalised into boxes, and value cannot be analysed in a scientific manner as a list of particular properties. However, because value does not conform to the same standards as scientific fact, there is no need to suppose that it is not real and active in the lives of individuals. Murdoch believes that unless the non-factual aspects of life are recognised and articulated, then human beings will have 'lost something'. This 'something' is the ability to articulate and communicate not only moral values, but other aspects of life such as emotion – in fact, all the 'deep' areas which provide the substance and quality of life. Therefore, in order to endorse Murdoch's good one must employ, as she suggests, an element of faith, and return to one's own experience. If one does this she firmly believes that one will discover the reality of the good, and with the right kind of dedication one will be able to see more of this reality.

¹¹⁵ See the beginning of this chapter, Section 4.2.

One of the strengths of Murdoch's thesis is that she includes areas which philosophy often neglects, but which are necessary for a full account of human life. In particular, she has reasserted the religious or spiritual factor, which she deems to be important for all human beings whether or not they are adherents of traditional religions. However, in some ways this is the weakness of her stance, in that dealing with such notions makes clarity and communication difficult, especially in the present philosophical climate. As we saw in the humanist critique¹¹⁶, philosophers have too often presented a very narrow view of what religious life is like. Escaping this caricature and accepting Murdoch's vision of religion can be difficult. Murdoch does not see religion as uniform, but praises certain aspects such as the mystical strains, and is highly critical of other aspects such as the literalist or fundamentalist strains. Patently she approves of mystical strains for their religious complexity, which in her opinion do not corrupt morality. Indeed, she believes that including a mystical element aids the perception of the moral reality and wishes even those with no religious belief to embrace a mystical attitude to the good. For many scholars the introduction of religion, especially in such a prominent position, makes her moral realism unpalatable, and they reject this element out of hand. Consequently, while many realists have endorsed her use of experience and her objective claims for the good, they dismiss, or simply ignore, the religious element of the apprehension of moral value. As a result, realists have a hard time convincing one of the reality of moral value, because without the religious dimension, it is nigh on impossible to account for why, if moral values are real, they are so elusive. Thus, the religious conception of the good is at the heart of Murdoch's realism, and rejecting it essentially returns one to the type of realisms advocated in the Chapter One.

4.7.5. Reduction to Morals

Though religion is at the core of Murdoch's realism, her position has not fared much better at the hands of theologians and religious scholars, who often see her work as too philosophical and even irreligious or anti-religious. Those in the religious camp have criticised Murdoch's programme of demythologisation as being nothing more than a simple

¹¹⁶ See Section 2.4.

reduction of religion to morals¹¹⁷. This criticism cannot be denied, since Murdoch's 'new religion' is entirely moral. However, the way one understands 'morality' determines whether or not one accepts that Murdoch's account is a 'reduction'. Murdoch is not suggesting, as other scholars¹¹⁸ who have reduced religion to morality do, that religion is simply a way of enforcing a set of moral values. For Murdoch, apprehending moral value, especially the good, is as much a religious quest as it is a moral one. Morality is not a narrow code, but rather a whole way of life which is religious in essence and is focused upon the absolute good. Hence, those who accuse her of reductionism have either failed to understand the depth of her moral conviction, or believe that religion is fundamentally concerned with a set of literal beliefs (in God, the creation and the afterlife) rather than being an open and attentive attitude to life and the world. Murdoch could be accused of reductionism in that she has rejected a religion defined by adherence to a creed in favour of a wholly this-worldly¹¹⁹ conception of religion, and in this sense she would be happy to be called a reductionist. Yet if this narrow definition of religion is adopted, then many religious thinkers, especially in the mystical tradition, would also be subject to the same charge. Moreover, Murdoch could certainly not be called a reductionist if that is interpreted to mean that she is removing the depth and significance which religion gives to life, for no one could doubt the fundamental importance which she attributes to the moral life.

In this manner, then, Murdoch often falls between the two opposing camps, an ironic situation as she holds that correctly comprehending the reality of the nature of moral value involves elements from both of these disciplines. However, the fact that her philosophy does not fit neatly into the categories of contemporary academic debate does not negate the power or the possible truthfulness of her vision – it simply makes it difficult to hear. Both philosophers and theologians often ignore her vision because it contains elements with

¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Allen asserts that by concentrating only on the moral aspect Murdoch has missed some of the most central aspects of the Christian God, such as of God as creator. Hence, he claims that "Murdoch's judgement that God is a dispensable notion, intellectually and morally, appears arbitrary" [Allen, 1993, p.25]. This criticism may be true but it is not within the scope of Murdoch's moral thesis.

¹¹⁸ See humanists of Chapter Two.

¹¹⁹ What is meant by this term is that which can be known by extrapolating from the evidence of this world. Thus, it means that which is not supernatural, and should not be read as that which is temporal as opposed to eternal.

which they are uneasy, and for this reason both disciplines have often failed to take both her criticisms and her prescriptions seriously.

4.7.6. A Common-Sense Realism

Thus, though contemporary realists “refer with respect to Murdoch’s decisive influence on the renewal of the case for objectivity in ethics” [Kerr, 1997, p.70], her own thesis, in which religion is an integral part, has largely been ignored. Nonetheless, Murdoch’s basic appeal to experience is a tactic which realists have widely employed, and without a doubt remains the foremost weapon in their arsenal. However, even this component of her philosophy has come under criticism from some who simply do not find in their own experience the values of which Murdoch talks. For example, Cupitt argues that Murdoch’s description of moral values is false¹²⁰. Those who do not find evidence of moral value in their experience hold that, in a similar manner to traditional religion, Murdoch is imposing a false morality. Such critics suggest that not only is Murdoch wrongly presenting values as absolute, but in a manner parallel to religion, she exalts the objective good at the expense of human worth and value. Murdoch is accused of allotting all the best characteristics to the good, and depicting human beings as illusion-ridden and selfish.

It is true to say that at times Murdoch’s picture of human beings is very dark. She describes humans as naturally selfish and the moral life as an endless on-going struggle to defeat the ego; a task which often appears to be impossible. However, it is wrong to suggest that Murdoch conceives of human beings as having ‘no good in them’ in contrast to the radiant good. She does take seriously the darker side of human life (something humanists have often been criticised for failing to do), however, she argues that even in the most debased and illusion-ridden state there are inklings of moral value and the good. If this were not the case, there would be no moral life for humans would not be fundamentally moral beings.

¹²⁰ Cupitt states that Murdoch, like Plato, separates morality from nature resulting in morality being “reactive, inhibitive, anti-life and supernatural” [Cupitt, 1987, p.44]. In a similar vein, Blackburn describes her moral vision as ‘repellent’, and states that in her work “the age-old device, freely indulged, is to exult the mystery of the unconditional by debasing the everyday. The more depraved the unredeemed spirit seems the greater the importance of redemption. Since everyday life is so abject, we need a transfiguration to become anything good or truthful” [Blackburn, 1992, p.3].

Murdoch's picture does not portray humans as worthless when compared to the supreme good, but rather as mixed beings with a huge capacity for egoism and self-delusion, alongside a corresponding capacity to love the good and to be good. Moreover, the objective good is not disconnected and separate from the moral life, for goodness is entirely to do with what it is to be human. Awareness of value is not something which is imposed from 'outside' but it is very much part of human awareness. Human beings are drawn to the good, to *love* the good, for the moral life is not simply duty, but creative and passionate; it cannot be detached from other areas of life, but is a way of being in the world.

Part of the difficulty here seems to be a certain understanding of subjective and objective. One of Murdoch's fundamental premises is the connection between transcendence and immanence, a coupling which can be paralleled to objective and subjective. If one maintains that subjective and objective are opposites, then the tendency is to equate subjective with the self and transcendence with that which is 'outside' the self. Such an understanding sets up a false picture in which the self is an isolated entity, and in order to be 'true to oneself' one must act entirely from inner impulses. By contrast, everything which is not of the self is deemed to be objective and hence imposed from outside. This model of the self and its relationship to the world is distorted, for human beings are not islands unto themselves, but are shaped by and shape others and their environment. The terms objective and subjective may once have been useful labels, but they have become too restrictive as they no longer indicate a general position, but are thought of as signifying separate and distinct origins. Such a contention is, on inspection, obviously misguided as nothing can ever be wholly subjective or wholly objective¹²¹; at least if this were the case they would not be interpreted as such by human beings. Unfortunately, the assumption of the opposition of objectivity and subjectivity, like transcendence and immanence, is so ingrained in our understanding that this fallacy is rarely pointed out and has become fundamental in many areas of academic study. If one adopts this framework, then one will criticise Murdoch for elevating the good at the expense of human beings. However, if one rejects this opposition, as Murdoch plainly

¹²¹ In that to be wholly subjective would preclude the use of common concepts and language and prevent communication, and to be wholly objective would deny the personal; even more impossible.

does, then one will be able to envisage the manner in which the good can be objective without being 'outside' the human realm. If objective and subjective are not opposites then objective does not equate with outside imposition. The claim that the good is objective is not the claim that there is a set moral code to which individuals must comply. The good is part of reality; it runs through all human thoughts and actions, and is recognised in concrete instances. The good does not impose what is goodness, goodness simply is. But, in knowing of the reality of goodness one gains the ability to judge between actions and ways of life. One is not coerced to act – moral demand is about one's duty to others and oneself – one can move towards the good or not as one chooses. Choosing not to move in the direction of goodness is a choice one is free to make, and in this move one will still use values in order to make evaluations, no less than if one moves towards the good. What one cannot do is change the good, and in this sense some may complain that Murdoch has imposed limits. However, such a criticism is only effective if one maintains that human beings are entirely free and have no limitations – an unrealistic supposition. The human condition is limited and therefore freedom operates within certain spheres. Humans are restricted, physically by their bodies and life span, emotionally by their need to be in relation to other human beings, and in many other ways. Consequently, though human beings are limited by their moral nature and by the moral reality, this does not destroy freedom. Instead, it signals a limitation of the human condition, that is akin to the other limitations.

This criticism made of Murdoch is that she misrepresents moral experience. However, it seems that she is more true to experience than those who maintain that values are determined by one's own choice. Part of the consequence of the opposition of subjective and objective is that if one dismisses objective morality, one is forced to adopt the alternative subjective morality. The subjective assertion is that there is no morality other than that which we invent; a position which truly denies experience. To consider moral evaluations as merely matters of preference, rather than as highly significant, is not representative of human experience and could be described as excessively reductionist. Experience teaches that moral positions are not matters of taste, but defining factors in how one perceives oneself and

others. Even if one does not – in this pervasively relativist society – actively attempt to change the opinions of others on moral issues, it is still the case that on certain issues one believes that some things are right and others wrong (even if it is not acceptable to say it). Murdoch fears the onward march of subjectivism and relativism, and she aims to make it again possible to state philosophically the validity of certain opinions over others.

Morality, then, is fixed in that the good is absolute. However, there is always an element of imagination and creativity; one must strive to see the real and the good in every situation. Goodness cannot be neatly compartmentalised, and what is ‘better’ in one situation may not be so in another. One must look to the details of the case and the instances of the transcendent good in the particular situation. Thus, Murdoch is not arguing that there are rules for good acts and bad acts, and that there is never dilemma or conflict. Her picture is not one in which knowing the good provides a list of rules which if known could then be followed. Rather, goodness is transcendent in that it surpasses all individuals and situations, but it is also part of reality and hence it is to be interpreted and manifested in the lives of individuals, and as such appears in as many guises as individuals do.

4.8. Conclusion

The philosophy of Iris Murdoch offers a realist construction that overcomes many of the obstacles which have beset the realist cause. By introducing the aesthetic and religious, Murdoch broadens the sphere of human knowledge and thus dispenses with the supposition of the first chapter, viz. that for values to be ‘real’ they must equate with other facts. Motivation is not either a cognitive or an emotional response, but is both in that it comes from one’s whole being and is determined by the whole of one’s life. Furthermore, Murdoch has suggested a far fuller account than MacLagan of how moral values can be claimed to have authority without needing a divine or aesthetic source. Moral values are authoritative because they are a real part of the fabric of the world and part of human reasons for action. In Murdoch’s schema, individuality does not suffer at the expense of value (as it did in the divine command theory) nor does moral value suffer at the expense of individuality (as it did

in the non-cognitivist schools of thought, where morality is simply personal choice). Murdoch attempts to do justice to the whole area of moral life, which for her must include a religious element, although as Kerr notes many would disagree with her definition of 'religious' – "a thinker is religious, in Murdoch's sense, when he finds there is no gap, ultimately between the facts and our values" [Kerr, 1997, pp.86-87]. Murdoch has presented a framework in which the moral and the religious are intertwined and are part of the same quest. To live a fully moral life one must embrace the religious – although religious here is carefully defined – and for one's religion to be true it must be grounded in reality, in the reality of the sovereign good. Thus, Murdoch has brought moral realism out of the arena of current academic debate and returned the focus to the moral experience of human beings.

Many will remain unconvinced by Murdoch's vision for various reasons; perhaps because of a belief they hold, or an unwillingness to include nebulous non-scientific concepts, especially religious concepts. If this is the case then it may be impossible for such persons to recognise that the good is real. As Murdoch herself states, "the question of which metaphysician you love is partly a matter of temperament" [Bronzwaer, 1988, p.66], which may also be true of one's moral standpoint. However, the unwillingness may simply be borne out of a lack of comprehension of her concepts. In order to clarify her position, the next chapter will return to Plato, the major source of her position, to learn more about Murdoch's good and to see whether Plato's philosophy can add to Murdoch's conception of moral value and its relationship to religion.

Chapter Five: Plato's Conception of Moral Values and of the Good

5.1. Introduction

In the last chapter Murdoch's conception of the relationship of morality and religion was introduced and assessed. Her moral realism, which centred around the good, was explored. In order better to understand Murdoch's philosophy this chapter focuses upon the philosophy of Plato and his conception of moral value and the moral life. The intention is that this investigation will clarify Murdoch's position and add to her thesis, both with regard to the nature of moral value and its relationship to religion.

5.1.1. A Question of Knowledge

Moral values for Plato are the forms, or rather certain forms. However, determining the exact nature of the forms is no easy task because Plato nowhere offers a systematic account of them. Consequently, the nature of the forms has been a source of much debate from the Academy to the present day. Yet, notwithstanding the difficulty in determining their nature, they are a crucial component of Plato's thought in all areas – ethical, logical, physical and political – for they are the reality upon which all knowledge is founded.

The forms are the means by which Plato attempts to establish objective truth in opposition to the prevalent Sophism of Athens in the fifth century BC. Sophism encouraged "disbelief in the possibility of knowledge about ultimate realities or of absolute standards" [Grube, 1935, p.3], and it is in contrast to this scepticism:

that Plato insisted upon the possibility of knowledge and upon the existence of absolute values. To do this he had to establish the existence of an objective, universally valid reality, and this he found in the forms or ideas. [Grube, 1935, p.3]

Thus, forms are intended to ensure certainty with regard to truth and to support the “fundamental premises of his arguments in the moral and political spheres” [Rowe, 1984, p.83]. For Plato the existence of the forms was clear, for he maintained that there must be “fundamental underlying elements that account for the phenomena we humans experience” [Moravcsik, 1992, p.59]. These underlying elements Plato termed ‘forms’¹²², and to these he turned in order “to lay the foundation of logic and avoid the objections of the Sophists” [Shorey, 1982, p.11], and, most importantly for this study, to uphold “the objectivity of moral values” [Rowe, 1984, p.83]. The dispute between the Sophists and Plato is not dissimilar to the debate discussed earlier, that between realists and non-cognitivists. Plato’s forms are an assertion of the realism of moral values and of other necessary truths, and like today’s realists Plato believed that ordinary experience “provides us with sufficient evidence for the deduction of ideas” [Rosen, 1963, p.408].

The issues with which Plato was wrestling, and which provided impetus for his forms, are as controversial today as they were in Plato’s era, for as Shorey notes, we are faced with the same choice: “we must either despair altogether of logical dialectical truth or believe that our words somehow contain such truth” [Shorey, 1982, p.7]. The function of the forms, then, is to maintain an account of the universe in which values, logic and other truths, such as mathematics, are certain, and so provide a base upon which to build knowledge.

5.1.2. The Assumption of Forms

Notably, despite the importance of the forms to Plato’s philosophy, when one turns to the dialogues themselves one is “at once struck by the fact that this theory of Forms...actually occupies a relatively small space in the works themselves” [Grube, 1935, p.7]. Plato never describes the nature of a form in detail, nor does he argue directly for their existence; there is “no occasion on which...(Plato)...offers us any sort of systematic account of them” [Rowe, 1984, p.52]. Furthermore, Plato “nowhere in the dialogues has an extended discussion of forms in which he pulls together the different lines of thought about them and tries to assess

¹²² ‘ἰδεα’; translated literally as ‘look like’, commonly called ‘forms’ or ‘ideas’.

the needs they meet and whether they succeed in meeting them” [Annas, 1981, p.217]. In addition, rather than arguing for the forms they are simply assumed, and are usually introduced in order to support or explain another issue.

5.1.3. A ‘Theory’ of Forms?

When discussing forms commentators often speak about ‘A Theory of Forms’, or ‘The Theory of Forms’. However, to discover any ‘theory’ seems to be reading into the dialogues something which does not appear to be there. Certainly, there is no explicit theory, a conclusion borne out by the difficulties commentators have in describing what the ‘Theory’ consists of. Attributing any ‘Theory of Forms’ to Plato seems to be imposing a system which is not there, or at the very least extrapolating to a large degree from the meagre kernel which is present in the dialogues.

A further reason for not using the terminology of the ‘Theory of Forms’ is that all too often it conjures up a picture of Platonic forms as “eternal, unchanging, universal absolutes, independent of the world of phenomena; in, for example, absolute beauty, absolute justice, absolute goodness, from which whatever we call beautiful, just or good derives any reality it might have” [Grube, 1935, p.1]. Although this sketch of the forms is present in the dialogues, it is by no means the only possible impression, and in studying the dialogues, themselves we encounter alternative readings of the forms, some of which complement this thesis and others of which run contrary to it. Hence, for the purposes of this study, rather than getting embroiled in opposing views of different theories, we will simply look at the dialogues themselves and discuss characteristics of the forms, rather than asserting one theory over another.

5.1.4. Tripartite Division

Forms are not static conceptions which remain the same throughout Plato’s philosophy, rather, Plato’s understanding of forms is continually changing and evolving; “Plato is

himself constantly feeling his way forward” [Rowe, 1984, p.53]. Yet, though the nature of forms gradually evolves, there are points at which dramatic changes in his understanding occur. In particular, there are three main periods in Plato’s thinking about forms, and in an attempt to discuss the nature of forms commentators have divided Plato’s thinking on the subject into these three: early, middle and late. The difference between the periods is so obvious that Ostenfeld observes there is “not just one doctrine of forms but three doctrines or more precisely one doctrine undergoing important changes” [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.9]. (As with the term ‘theory’, the term ‘doctrine’ will be disregarded in this thesis.)

It is useful to divide the dialogues in this way for ease of studying the forms. However, it is important to note that these categorisations are simply tools to make the task easier and therefore should be treated provisionally. At best these divisions can provide a structure and framework for study; they are by no means definitive. For example, there are elements of the middle forms in the later dialogues (e.g. in the *Timaeus*) and elements of the later forms in the early and middle dialogues¹²³. As this chapter progresses it will become apparent that, “not only may different dialogues contain different approaches to the subject, but whatever he says in any place has an element of provisionality already built into it” [Rowe, 1984, p.53]. The provisionality which is inherent in Plato’s forms stems from the fact that Plato is working out, revising, questioning and restating his notion of forms as he progresses. Yet despite this, and perhaps because of it¹²⁴, throughout his work the forms are, and remain, “an indispensable ingredient in Platonic philosophy” [Ostenfeld, 1983, p9].

5.1.5. The Order of the Dialogues

In attempting to study Plato’s forms the dialogues must be placed in order, however provisional, in order to be able to work with them. Unfortunately, there is no standard order, and scholars have hotly debated the sequence in which the dialogues were written. There

¹²³ Interest in natural and physical forms, which characterises the forms of the later dialogues, is certainly present in the early and middle ones – though less important perhaps, e.g. white hair, shuttle, bed etc.

¹²⁴ In that forms have the flexibility to change with Plato’s thinking as a whole.

does, however, appear to be a general consensus regarding the three periods of early, middle and late.

The order assumed in this study is that the early period contains the ‘Socratic dialogues’, plus the *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, *Euthydemus* and the *Cratylus*. To this list some scholars also add the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*. However, given the remit of this chapter (to discover the forms) it seems sensible to put them in the middle period because the characteristics of forms in these dialogues fit better with the middle rather than the earlier dialogues. The middle period contains these two, plus *The Republic*, the *Phaedrus* and the *Parmenides*. The later period contains the *Theatetus*, the *Sophist*, the *Politicus* (or *Statesman*), the *Philebus*, the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*. Again, there is disagreement about the position of the *Parmenides* and the *Theatetus*, which here are placed according to the nature of the forms they respectively portray.

5.2. The Characteristics of Forms

5.2.1. The Early Dialogues

Forms as such are not present in the early, mainly Socratic, dialogues. However, what is present are the thought processes and motivations which eventually lead Plato to the forms. By tracing these we can see why the notion of forms was arrived at, and even some of the components which characterised later forms. It is important to remember that these early dialogues are concerned with addressing the practical issues at hand, not with the metaphysical implications which ultimately lead to a conception of forms. Therefore, one must be careful not to read back into these dialogues the forms of the later periods.

5.2.1.1. Search for Definition and Common Qualities

The main impetus for forms, as already noted, is the search for knowledge, reality and truth, and it is in endeavouring to define the various questions at hand that the notions, which later lead to forms, begin. The aim of these Socratic dialogues, as Ostenfeld notes, is to answer a

“what-is-X question” [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.11], and as Shorey comments, “anyone searching for dialectical truth must either search for definitions or else assume them; for the beginning of all enquiry is ““what does it mean?”” [Shorey, 1982, p.12]. Thus, the search for definition is part of the search for truth, which is Plato’s overriding purpose.

This search for definition can be seen clearly in many of these early dialogues. For example, in the *Laches* the search is for a definition of courage, and in the *Euthyphro*, for holiness.

In the *Euthyphro* the search is for a definition of holiness itself, not for examples of holiness, but for “piety in every action...(which is)...always the same...and impiety...(which is)...also the same with itself, having, as impiety, a notion which includes whatever is impious” [Euthyphro, 5, 1892, Vol. 2, p.79]. Euthyphro initially defines piety by saying that it is doing as he is doing; prosecuting anyone who is guilty of sacrilege. This answer does not provide a definition, but is simply an instance. Socrates chides Euthyphro with the following:

Remember that I did not ask you to give me two or three examples of piety, but to explain the general idea which makes all pious things to be pious. Do you not recollect that there was one idea which made the impious impious, and the pious pious. [Euthyphro, 6, 1892, Vol. 2, p.80]

Therefore, the search for definition leads not to a number of examples, but to “*concrete common qualities*” [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.9]¹²⁵. The search points beyond the particular instances, because in looking for the universal ‘X’ the implication is that ‘X’ cannot be described just by citing particulars. Therefore, the search is for the “*single self-identical entity in many things...that is responsible for them being what they are*” [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.21], i.e. the reason why an object or action is termed ‘x’ is because of the presence of ‘X’, and it is this ‘X’ which Socrates is attempting to define. For example, if one returns to the *Euthyphro*, Socrates is searching for a clear definition of holiness itself, demanding:

¹²⁵ For example, in the *Laches*, what is sought is the “common quality inherent in all courageous actions” [Grube, 1935, p.6] not individual examples.

Tell me what is the nature of this idea, and then I shall have a standard to which I may look, and by which I may measure actions, whether yours or those of anyone else, and then I shall be able to say that such and such an action is pious, such another impious. [Euthyphro, 6, 1892, Vol. 2, p.80]

Euthyphro's suggestion is that piety in all cases is "that which is dear to the gods" [Euthyphro, 6, 1892, Vol. 2, p.80], and impiety is that which the gods hate. This definition proves to be inadequate because the same actions, persons and things can be both loved and hated by the gods. In addition, this definition fails because it is impossible to determine which is prior; is an action loved by the gods because it is good, or good because it is loved by the gods¹²⁶. All in all, Euthyphro's definition does not provide a satisfactory standard, and Socrates complains that "when I ask you what is the essence of holiness, you offer an attribute only, and not the essence...you still refuse to explain to me the nature of holiness" [Euthyphro, 11, 1892, Vol. 2, p.86]. Euthyphro agrees, declaring that he cannot do what Socrates asks because "somehow or other our arguments...seem to turn round and walk away from us" [Euthyphro, 11, 1892, Vol. 2, p.86]. Therefore, even though no definition of piety is arrived at and there is no conclusion to the dialogue, this search for definition has led to the conception of common qualities. The move towards a universal conception which is applicable in every case is a step towards forms, and it signifies Plato's wish for certainty and knowledge, which is not attained in this dialogue, but is later satisfied by the forms.

5.2.1.2. Co-extensive with Particulars

An important aspect of the common qualities which Socrates is searching to define, especially in the light of later forms, is that they are present, and even made up of, the particulars in which they are found. Socrates is looking for "common elements among qualitatively identical groups" [Moravcsik, 1992, p.57]. He is not distinguishing the universal from the instances, but is "describing no more than the common characteristics of particular things to which the same predicate is applied, these common qualities being considered *not as transcendentally existing but as immanent in the particulars*" [Grube, 1935,

¹²⁶ See Chapter Two for discussion of the Euthyphro dilemma.

p.9]. In these early dialogues, Socrates does “not posit a separate entity with its own specific nature” [Moravcsik, 1992, p.60]. In fact, common qualities are not distinct from, but identified with, their instances. For example, in the *Euthyphro*, Socrates asks not just for examples, but for what “all such actions ‘look like’, so that he can identify them as you would identify a man from a description of his appearance” [Grube, 1935, p.10]. By saying ‘look like’, Socrates is assuming that the common quality is present and seen in the particular¹²⁷. Consequently, Ostenfeld asserts that piety is “neither particular in the ordinary sense nor...abstract” [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.14]. In other words, while the concept can be distinguished from the particular in thought, the quality itself exists in its examples *alone*.

Thus, though a certain move away from individual examples has occurred, the common element is not separate from the particulars. Rather, common qualities are “identical with...instances...*concrete and particular*” [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.14]. At this juncture, Plato has not yet taken the step of positing objective values which are seen in, but transcend, particulars. Overarching definitions have been introduced, but not ontologically existing qualities or values.

5.2.1.3. Summary

In sum, then, these early dialogues, while not containing forms, certainly contain elements which lead to the forms of the later dialogues. As Ostenfeld notes, the universals of the early dialogues are a “special kind of *empirical truths*” [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.11], which commit Plato to a “belief in the existence, not of abstract universals, but of a kind of *concrete common qualities*” [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.11]. Therefore, the move to forms has begun, for in distinguishing between the examples of x and the essence of X, a division is made which is enlarged in the further dialogues and results in the establishment of fully-blown forms. Thus, contained in these dialogues are many of the factors which led Plato to the positing of forms as the explanation of why things are the way they are.

¹²⁷ This is in contrast to later dialogues, in which the forms are discovered and at which point the particulars participate in forms, rather than being identified with them.

5.2.2. The Middle Dialogues

In the middle period, forms progress from the common qualities of the early dialogues and emerge as a distinctive element in Plato's thinking; an element which characterises his philosophy and enables him to make the claims he does. The forms of this period arise as a natural development from the previous dialogues, because "what was common to all searches for definitions was the assumption that there are such things as universals" [Ross, 1951, p.225]. It is with this period that what is referred to as the 'Theory of Forms' has most often been identified. Plato is at his most optimistic about the forms in these dialogues, the *Republic*, in particular, shows the "excitement with which Plato viewed his ontological discovery" [Moravcsik, 1992, p.85]. However, even in this middle period the forms are not argued for explicitly, and despite the *Republic's* role as a "major source of the 'Theory of Forms'...there is no open treatment of what they contribute" [Annas, 1981, p.217]¹²⁸.

5.2.2.1. Absolute

One of the characteristics of the forms in the middle period is that they are absolute. For example, the *Phaedo*, talks of "absolute justice...absolute beauty and absolute good" [Phaedo, 65, Vol. 2, p.204], and asserts that that "there is nothing...so patent as that beauty, goodness and the other notions...(which)...have a most real and absolute existence" [Phaedo, 77, Vol. 2, p.219]. Such a conception of the forms is echoed in the *Phaedrus*, in which the forms are described as being of "justice, and temperance, and knowledge absolute, not in the form of generation or of relation, which men call existence, but knowledge absolute in existence absolute" [Phaedrus, 247, Vol. 1, p.453].

The term absolute appears to signify a purity; that the form is the 'thing in itself', not mixed or qualified by any other thing. For example, the form of beauty is pure beauty in an unqualified sense. Sayre describes the forms as being "wholly what they are" [Sayre, 1983,

¹²⁸ As noted earlier, in this study arguments about whether and what constitutes a 'Theory of Forms' will be ignored, for such arguments do not add to this discussion (other than causing unnecessary confusion). Hence, comments about 'the' or 'a' Theory of Forms must simply be viewed as giving information about forms in general.

p.5], in that they contain no other elements or qualifications, and hence they are “simple in nature” [Moravcsik, 1992, p.71]. Therefore, in being absolute, the forms are untouched by anything else; they “in no way depend upon other things for being what they are” [Sayre, 1983, p.6]. Being absolute means that forms in this period appear not as “universals manifested in particulars but as ideals, standards, or limits to which individual things only approximate” [Ross, 1951, pp.23-24], thereby fulfilling Socrates wish of the *Euthyphro*. Hence, forms are simply the quality of the form without limit or qualification.

5.2.2.2. *Unchanging*

A further attribute of the forms, and one at which the term ‘absolute’ hints, is that they are unchanging. This is manifested in the *Phaedo* in which Socrates asks the following question of Cebes:

Is that idea or essence, which in the dialectical process we define as essence or true existence – whether essence of equality, beauty, or anything else – are these essences...liable at times to some degree of change? Or are they each of them always what they are, having the same simple self-existent and unchanging forms. Not admitting of variation at all, or in any way, or at any time? [Phaedo, 78, 1892, Vol. 2, p.221]

The answer Socrates receives from Cebes is that “they must always be the same” [Phaedo, 7, 1892, Vol. 2, p.221], an answer which is unquestioned and assumed (as are the forms themselves) in this passage. Their unchanging nature is further illustrated by the description of the soul entering the unseen “region of purity, and eternity, and immortality, and unchangeableness, which are her kindred...she ceases from her erring ways, and being in communion with the unchanging is unchanging” [Phaedo, 79, 1892, Vol. 2, p.222].

The characteristic of unchangingness directly contrasts forms with the objects of sense perception, which are constantly changing and in a state of permanent flux. In fact, the marked difference between forms and particulars leads Socrates to “suppose that there are two sorts of existence – one seen, the other unseen...the seen is the changing, and the unseen is the unchanging” [Phaedo, 79, 1892, Vol. 2, p.221]. The unchanging form is affecting, but

not affected. For example, the participation of particulars “does not affect the Forms; they do not decrease, increase, lose anything, and so on” [Moravcsik, 1992, p.73].

5.2.2.3. *Apprehended by the Mind Alone*

In the early dialogues, universals were “inextricably conjoined and confused” [Ross, 1951, p.225] with sense perception. However, in the middle dialogues the forms (or universals as Ross continues to refer to them) become distinct from sense perception and known to the mind alone, for it is the mind which is able to “grasp universals in their pure form” [Ross, 1951, p.225]. This distinction of the forms from particulars is one of the defining characteristics of the forms in this period. Previously, universals have been arrived at by a process of generalisation from the instances to the common quality which lies behind these. Now it is the forms which precede the particulars. For the first time the senses are not to be trusted; they can only lead to opinion, never knowledge – which belongs to the mind alone.

This separation of the forms from their instances is shown in the *Phaedo* when Socrates rejects the possibility that the senses can provide true knowledge. In speaking of the soul's relationship to the body, Socrates postulates that “in company with the body she is obviously deceived” [Phaedo, 65, 1892, Vol. 2, p.204], for “must not true existence be revealed to her in thought” [Phaedo, 65, 1892, Vol. 2, p.204]. Socrates' premise is that “the essence or true nature of everything” [Phaedo, 65, 1892, Vol. 2, p.204] can be known to the mind alone; the bodily senses are “distracting elements which when they infect the soul hinder her from acquiring truth and knowledge” [Phaedo, 66, 1892, Vol. 2, p.205].

Socrates proffers the example of the form of ‘the equal’, which is known by the mind even though it can never be encountered in the physical world. Socrates observes that “the same pieces of wood or stone appear at one time equal, and at another time unequal” [Phaedo, 74, 1892, Vol. 2, p.215]. However, because real equals can never be unequal, he concludes that “these (so-called) equals are not the same with the idea of equality” [Phaedo, 74, 1892, Vol. 2, p.215]. Nonetheless, from these imperfect particulars the idea of equality is grasped. From

this Socrates surmises that, “before we began to see or hear or perceive in any way, we must have had a knowledge of absolute equality, or we could not have referred to that standard the equals which are derived from the senses...for to that they all aspire, and of that they fall short” [Phaedo, 75, Vol. 2, p.216]. Thus, the form of the equal is not derived from sense experience, as were the common qualities of the Socratic dialogues. Instead, the equal, which can never be known by the senses, is apprehended by the mind alone.

This rejection of the senses as being able to give true knowledge is expanded and strengthened in the *Republic*. In Book Five a distinction is made between a true philosopher (one who searches after true knowledge and does not rely on the senses) and the ‘lover of sights and sounds’ (who does not go beyond the senses). The ‘sight-lovers’ are described as “having a sense of beautiful things...(but)...no sense of absolute beauty” [Republic, 476, 1892, Vol. 3, p.174], because they remain content with sensible objects and therefore are only capable of achieving opinion, not knowledge. Thus, knowledge and opinion are crucially divided; “the mind of one who knows has knowledge, and...the mind of the other, who opines only, has opinion” [Republic, 476, 1892, Vol. 3, p.174]. Knowledge and opinion are held to be different faculties (“powers in us” [Republic, 477, 1892, Vol. 3, p.175]) which “have to do with different kinds of matter corresponding to this difference of faculties” [Republic, 477, 1892, Vol. 3, p.175]. The faculties have “distinct powers...(and)...also distinct spheres or subject matters” [Republic, 478, 1892, Vol. 3, p.176], knowledge being the “mightiest of all faculties” [Republic, 477, 1892, Vol. 3, p.176]. The sight-lover will not see the beautiful as an “absolute or unchangeable idea” [Republic, 479, 1892, Vol. 3, p.178], but will look at beautiful things which will from “some point of view be found ugly; the same is true of the rest” [Republic, 479, 1892, Vol. 3, p.178] – i.e. of just, holy, great, heavy and so on. Thus, opinion is of sense objects which are composed of being and non-being, beautiful and ugly, just and unjust etc., whereas, by contrast, knowledge is of objects which are absolute, namely the forms. Hence, in these middle dialogues it seems that the senses are unconnected to true knowledge; they involve different

faculties and objects, and hence true knowledge is apprehended by the mind alone and not by the senses.

5.2.2.4. *Separate*

The notion that knowledge cannot be attained by the senses, but only by the mind, separates the particulars, which are known by the senses, from the forms. As Grube observes, there is, “no longer any doubt that we are dealing with Forms which have an existence of their own quite apart from the particular phenomena of the world we know” [Grube, 1935, p.15]. The insistence that the forms are separate is found in the *Phaedrus* in the passage which describes the transmigration of the soul. The soul is pictured here as having the potential to journey beyond the heavens to the place of true existence. If the soul is strong enough it will be able to reach the upper world and contemplate the true forms. However, the path is not easy and the soul may not succeed as it may be ‘lamed’ or have its ‘wings broken’ because of the “ill driving of the charioteers” [Phaedrus, 248, 1892, Vol. 1, p.454]¹²⁹ when it is joined to the body. If the soul succeeds it will achieve entry into the habitation of the gods where “beauty, wisdom, goodness, and the like” [Phaedrus, 246, 1892, Vol. 1, p.453] reside. Being in the presence of the forms nourishes the soul, for “once more gazing on the truth...(the soul)...is replenished and made glad” [Phaedrus, 247, 1892, Vol. 1, p.453]. The forms are described as “the very being with which true knowledge is concerned; the colourless, formless, intangible essence, visible only to the mind, the pilot of the soul” [Phaedrus, 247, 1892, Vol. 1, p.453]. This passage shows the separation of forms and particulars, to the extent that the soul must escape particulars in order to gaze upon the forms.

‘Separate’ seems to be the preferred term used to mark a move from the notion of forms as contained in their instances to forms as distinct “transcendent Forms...disembodied Ideas” [Ross, 1952, p.35]. Thus, the term ‘separate’ appears to be linked to the notion of ‘transcendence’, and commentators suggest that both ‘separate’ and ‘transcendent’ are used

¹²⁹ The charioteer represents reason in the soul and drives the two horses of courage and desire – the lower two parts of the soul.

to indicate the same idea (i.e. distinction of particulars and forms). The term 'separate' would appear to indicate an ontological claim which Plato is making with regard to the forms. He is not simply asserting that forms are now distinguished from particulars in the sense that a distinct abstract concept or universal can be conceived¹³⁰. A concept, however abstract, could not fulfil the roles of the forms in this period, in that particular concepts could not be causes of particulars. What Plato is doing by declaring the forms 'separate' and 'transcendent' is asserting that they are "independent in an ontological sense" [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.26]. Plato is claiming the existence of the forms, as something real and necessary, and in a manner which is separate and distinct from the existence of material objects.

5.2.2.5. The Question of Separation

Having noted Plato's assertion of the forms as transcendent, separate entities, we must also recognise that this is not always the case, or not unequivocally the case, in these middle dialogues. For example, in the *Symposium*, knowledge of the form of beauty begins in the sensible world, and it is from a recognition of the form in sensible objects that one can gradually progress to knowledge of the form.

Socrates describes how initially the seeker of beauty will recognise beauty in one particular instance and will love that object of beauty. The seeker will then, learning from his love, proceed to the second stage, and "perceive that the beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another" [Symposium, 210, 1892, Vol. 1, p.580]. Having learned to appreciate beauty in many different forms, the seeker will be able to connect them all and see that the beauty in one is the same as the beauty in another. The recognition of beauty in many instances and objects will "abate his violent love of the one, which he will despise and deem a small thing, and he will become a lover of all beautiful forms" [Symposium, 210, 1892, Vol. 1, p.580]. The next stage of the ascent is to understand that the beauty of the mind is more precious than the beauty of the outward form. The seeker will disregard physical appearance and look

¹³⁰ It is worth noting that although Ross continues to use the term "objective universals" [Ross, 1951, p.35], he does not mean universals in the sense that it is normally understood, but rather uses it to denote "a class of entities...that are entirely different from sensible things" [Ross, 1951, p.225].

only to the mind, and thereby “create many fair and noble thoughts and notions in boundless love of wisdom...and at last the vision is revealed to him of a single science, which is the science of beauty everywhere” [Symposium, 210, 1892, Vol. 1, p.581]. The final stage of the ascent is the vision of the form of beauty itself. At the last the seeker of beauty will:

Suddenly perceive a nature of wondrous beauty...a nature which in the first place is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning; secondly, not fair in one point of view and foul in another, or at one time or in one relation, or at one place fair, or at another time or in another relation or at another place foul, as if fair to some and foul to others, or in the likeness of a face or hands or any other part of the bodily frame, or in any form of speech or knowledge, or existing in any other being, as for example, in an animal, or in heaven, or in earth, or in any other place; but beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things. [Symposium, 210-211, 1892, Vol. 1, p.581]

In this passage, then, the form of beauty is without doubt a form of the middle period; it “reigns here supreme...it is the supreme reality considered as object of love” [Grube, 1935, p.21]. However, beauty, though possessing the characteristics outlined above, is also recognised in sensible particulars. Beauty is only truly itself in the form in which it is absolute. All particular instances are flawed because “*their* beauty is always qualified in some way, by being flawed, fragile, only comparative, or subject to differences of taste” [Rowe, 1984, p.54]. Nevertheless, beauty is not separate but present in particulars. There is a progression in the objects of beauty, and it is not easy to assert that the form and the instances are totally distinct.

This progression in the *Symposium* is echoed in the *Phaedrus*, where “divine beauty” [Phaedrus, 251, 1892, Vol. 1, p.457] shines forth the “most clearly recollected on earth and most beloved” [Grube, 1935, p.31] of the forms, “shining in clearness through the clearest aperture of sense” [Phaedrus, 250, 1892, Vol. 1, p.457]: sight. Again the senses, sight in particular, are pictured as being a starting point of a gradual progression to knowledge of the forms. In addition the form of the equal, found in the *Phaedo* (74ff), is known because sensible, unequal objects remind one of the existence of the true equal. Hence, in these

dialogues the separation is partial for it is via a co-operation of reason and the senses that knowledge is attained.

Thus, the separation of forms and particulars (a key characteristic of forms in these middle dialogues) is by no means established. There are still elements of connection. It seems that the separation, or not, of forms and particulars, comes from two contrasting threads of Plato's thought. On the one hand he wishes to affirm the reality of the forms and the certainty of knowledge, which leads him to separate the forms from the uncertainty of particulars, and on the other hand, he wishes to ground particulars in the forms in order to allow a progression towards knowledge.

5.2.2.6. Two Worlds?

The characteristic of separation, or transcendence, has led commentators from Aristotle onward to assume that Plato is advocating a two-world conception of forms in which the forms exist in one world and sensibles in another: two substances occupying two worlds. Such a concept they support with passages such as *Phaedo* 79 (quoted above). Furthermore, the passage in the *Republic* (476ff, see above) which distinguishes between knowledge and opinion and their objects, further encourages the two-world conception.

In earlier dialogues Plato treated particulars as real. However, in these middle dialogues particulars are no longer real but are between being and non-being, because they are "not purely whatever they are" [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.32]. Hence, as a result of this conception of phenomena, "the ordinary world in general is seen as a series of incomplete and temporary instantiations of forms" [Rowe, 1984, p.58]. This negation of the reality of particulars supports the two-world theory because it further divides forms – which are considered truly real – from sensibles – which are merely appearance; the objects of the sensible world are reduced to a 'dream-like' status.

Yet this is not the only reading of the situation, and Ross warns against this division, alleging that Plato never “made a complete bifurcation of the universe into Ideas and sensible things” [Ross, 1951, p.25]. Ross argues that there are various degrees of reality. For example, he places the mind between forms and sensibles, a conception which mitigates against any complete impenetrable divide. Ross maintains that even though the ideas are distinct ontologically and are separate from particulars, one does not need to postulate a separate world. Plato’s talk of an ‘other world’ can be conceived as relating to a different sphere within this world rather than of another world. In addition, the passages we have cited above from the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium* tell against the two-world theory and support the notion of degrees of reality. And although the forms are intelligible, rather than sensible (they have progressed from concrete universals), there is certainly evidence to suggest a continuum from sensibles to forms rather than a two-world reflection model.

The postulation of another world often leads to a picture in which forms exist in their world in a parallel manner to particulars in the sensible world. This assumption is potentially dangerous as it encourages one to conceive of the forms as having similar characteristics and qualities as sensible objects, rather than being different entities altogether. This contributes to a naive conception of forms as akin to material objects, and has wide ramifications for the question of participation, as will become clear later.

5.2.2.7. Forms as Causes

A final distinguishing feature of forms in this middle period is that they are ‘causes’ of – they precede – instances. For example, if we turn to the *Phaedo* we can see this quite clearly in the passage concerning the relationship of beautiful objects to the form of the beautiful. Socrates asserts that “if there be anything beautiful other than absolute beauty...it can be beautiful only in so far as it partakes of absolute beauty – and I should say the same of everything” [Phaedo, 100, 1892, Vol. 2, p.246]; for “nothing makes a thing beautiful but the presence and participation of beauty in whatever way or manner obtained; for as to the manner I am uncertain, but I stoutly contend that by beauty all beautiful things become

beautiful” [Phaedo, 100, 1892, Vol. 2, p.246]. Only the presence or participation of beauty makes a particular beautiful; beauty only and always comes from the form of beauty itself. Therefore, the claim is that the forms cause the particulars, in that particulars are what they are because of the forms.

The notion of the forms as causes is especially clear in the form of the good as revealed in the *Republic*. The form of the good is the cause of all other things, both visible and intelligible, the source of their nature and being; “a principle of explanation for all the forms” [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.34]. The notion of the form of the good as the cause of all other things is clearly elucidated in the first of the three images that Plato uses to describe the form of the good, namely the simile of the sun¹³¹. The simile of the sun contrasts the intelligible world and the visible world and suggests that the relations and functions in the visible world, which is known, are analogous to the intelligible world.

The comparison is one of many layers: at the highest level, the sun in the visible world is parallel to the form of the good in the intelligible world. The sun, the source of light and growth in the visible realm, is compared to the good which is the source of what is real and true in the intelligible realm; “it is the cause of knowledge and truth” [Republic, 508e, 1974, p.308]. Similarly, as the sun illuminates objects, making sight possible, so the good “gives the objects of knowledge their truth and the knower’s mind the power of knowing” [Republic, 508e, 1974, p.308].

The exact manner in which forms are causes of particulars is not made clear (a difficulty which is well attested in the problem of participation). Certain commentators have tried to decipher Plato’s meaning in his assertion that the good is the cause of particulars. Annas proposes that his contention that the good ‘makes things known’ could be taken as meaning that “goodness is fundamental in any explanation” [Annas, 1981, p.246] (an interpretation

¹³¹ Plato uses three images – the Sun, the divided line, and the cave – to describe the form of the good, the second and third images will be discussed in Section 5.6.1. of this chapter.

which she notes would be immediately rejected by modern philosophy¹³²). His second assertion (that the good makes things what they are) Annas supposes could be simply interpreted that “if goodness is fundamental for our understanding of the nature of things, then it must be fundamental in the nature of things, else our understanding would not reflect the world as it is” [Annas, 1981, p.246]. Thus, she suggests Plato’s basic claim, expressed in his analogy of the good and the sun, is that in a way similar to the sun’s importance in the visible realm, “goodness is supreme in the order of things, and hence basic to any attempt to make the world intelligible” [Annas, 1981, p.247]. Hence, Plato is claiming, as Murdoch does, that goodness is part of the human reality and essential in order for the world to be evaluated. Asserting that the good is a cause is to claim that the good is fundamental to knowing and understanding the world, a contention which is supported by the high status of the good and the power of the form of the good, and its place as the cause all things, both visible and intelligible. The good’s position is further attested to by Socrates:

In my opinion, for what it is worth, the final thing to be perceived in the intelligible region, and perceived only with difficulty, is the form of the good; once seen, it is inferred to be responsible for whatever is right and valuable in anything, producing in the visible region light and the source of light, and being in the intelligible region itself controlling source of truth and intelligence. And anyone who is going to act rationally either in public or private affairs must have sight of it. [Republic, 517b-c, 1974, p.321].

Forms, then, are “causes in the...sense that participation in them is both necessary and sufficient for being a thing of a given type” [Sayre, 1983, p.8]. In other words, what something is depends entirely upon the forms in which it partakes. Therefore, forms “provide standards or criteria by which sensible things (actions or objects) can be identified and distinguished from each other” [Sayre, 1983, p.9]. Moreover, the good is the most important value which must be known in order to know all other things.

¹³² See Chapter One on the fact/value divide – values are not facts and are therefore dismissed as far as explanations are concerned.

5.2.2.8. Summary

Thus, we see that the forms in the middle dialogues have certain distinctive characteristics: they are absolute, unchanging and eternal, intelligible, separate and transcendent, and causes of particulars. Forms answer questions about knowledge, which is possible because forms are real. Hence, knowing these realities allows one to know the rest of reality. Forms are objective, but yet are known in instances; without them knowledge is impossible.

5.2.3. The Late Dialogues

As we move into the later period we see a shift in the forms and their characteristics. This shift seems in part to do with the difficulties of participation, which come to light during the middle period¹³³. This conclusion is supported by Plato's failure to introduce forms in the *Theatetus*. In the *Theatetus* Plato wrestles with the nature of knowledge. However, instead of introducing the forms¹³⁴, as one would expect, Plato instead turns to sense perception. The dialogue, like many of the early Socratic dialogues, fails to reach any conclusion, and rather than introducing the forms which would provide a conclusion and the certainty which Plato craves, the dialogue ends inconclusively.

In addition, Plato's focus shifts away from the primarily ethical and mathematical forms of the middle period towards "a doctrine of natural kinds, connected with a new method of dialectic" [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.10]. Furthermore, in this period it becomes more difficult to determine what counts as a form. Instead of forms, the later dialogues have classes, subclasses, limits, kinds and species. Some commentators¹³⁵ interpret these classifications as forms, while others¹³⁶ maintain that they are entirely new methods intended to replace forms.

¹³³ See Section 5.3. on Participation.

¹³⁴ Though the forms are not mentioned, at 185ff there is a discussion of 'common notions' – "being and not-being, likeness and unlikeness, sameness and difference, and also unity and other numbers which are applied to objects of sense" [*Theatetus*, 185, Vol. 4, p.246]. It is possible to equate these 'notions' with forms. However, they are perceived by reasoning and sense perception, and their function is to order sense perception. Therefore, any comparison is certainly not direct, and they fail to provide the certainty with regard to knowledge that we have come to expect. Nor are they introduced with regards to the central issue of the nature of knowledge.

¹³⁵ For example, Ross.

¹³⁶ For example, Sayer and Ostenfeld.

5.2.3.1. *New Methodology*

In these later dialogues new methods of determining forms are adopted. In the earlier dialogues the most common method was that of generalisation, whereas now division along natural lines becomes commonplace¹³⁷. For example, in the *Sophist* the Stranger speaks of “division according to classes, which...is the business of dialectical science” [Sophist, 253, 1892, Vol. 4, p.386]. Instead of overarching forms we have classes and subclasses (which are also called forms). In this dialogue “some classes have a communion with one another, and others not, and some have communion with a few and others with many, and that there is no reason why some should not have universal communion with all” [Sophist, 254, 1892, Vol. 4, p.387]. The method of division also occurs in the *Politicus*¹³⁸, and again in the *Philebus*¹³⁹.

This change in method differs dramatically from that advocated in the early and middle dialogues. No longer is the objective of philosophy and dialectic to “deduce all truth from a single transcendent truth. It is more modest and a more realisable one...that of tracing the relations of assertability and deniability that exist between Ideas, and the relations of genus and species” [Ross, 1951, p.119]. Furthermore, division into ‘forms’ brings into question participation as it seems here that forms can mix, and that some forms are contained in other more general forms.

5.2.3.2. *Co-extension with Particulars*

The separation of forms and particulars, which is one of the markers of change between the Socratic universals and the forms of the middle dialogues, becomes far less distinct, and there is “a noticeable slackening of emphasis in the later dialogues on separation of forms from particulars” [Rowe, 1984, p.61]. As Ross notes, “no simple answer can be given”

¹³⁷ Although the method of division appeared once before in the middle dialogues, in the *Phaedrus*, when Plato talks of “division into species according to the natural formulation” [Phaedrus, 265, Vol. 1, p.474].

¹³⁸ In Section 262ff, where the method for identifying forms is by correct division.

¹³⁹ In Section 581ff, where we are told that the unit of the monad must be divided until “at last the unity with which we began is seen not only to be one and many and infinite, but also a definite number” [Philebus, 16, Vol. 4, p.581].

[Ross, 1951, p.228] to the question as to whether Plato consistently thought of forms “as existing separately from sensible things” [Ross, 1951, p.228]. It seems that in these dialogues, forms are rarely separate. Dialogues such as the *Sophist* and the *Politicus*, which are concerned with the classes and subclasses of the natural world, tell against any two-world divide and separation. There is nothing within these texts to infer the transcendent forms of the middle dialogues, and in fact we could have returned to something more akin to the universals, the “abstract entities” [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.62] of the early dialogues, though using a different methodology.

5.2.3.3. Reassessment of Characteristics

Not only is there a return to considering particulars as a potential source of true knowledge, but other characteristics of the forms of the middle dialogues are also undermined. For example, the ‘unchangableness’ of the forms is raised in the *Sophist*. In this dialogue the nature of ‘being’ is discussed, and it is postulated that “anything which possesses any sort of power to affect another, or to be affected by another, if only for a single moment, however trifling the cause and however slight the effect, has real existence” [Sophist, 247, 1892, Vol. 4, pp.378-379]. Therefore, in order for the forms to be real – part of being – they must admit “doing or suffering” [Sophist, 248, 1892, Vol. 4, p.379]. Hence, the argument runs that knowing the form could be deemed to be acting upon it, for “in so far as it is known...(it)...is acted upon by knowledge and is therefore in motion; for that which is in a state of rest cannot be acted upon” [Sophist, 248, 1892, Vol. 4. p.380]. Consequently, true being must have motion, life, soul and mind, and it is impossible to imagine that it is devoid of these, and “exists in awful unmeaningless and everlasting fixture” [Sophist, 249, 1892, Vol. 4. p.380]. This conclusion is qualified by the assertion that if “we grant that all things are in motion – upon this view...mind has no existence” [Sophist, 249, 1892, Vol. 4, p.380], because without rest nothing could maintain the same condition. Therefore, neither rest nor universal motion can apply to true being, hence, being is both “the movable and immovable” [Sophist, 249, 1892, Vol. 4, p.381].

This assertion that true being contains rest and motion is an unexpected turning point for the previously unchanging forms. In the light of the preceding dialogues it is hard to grasp the premise, introduced in this dialogue, that an object of knowledge cannot be unchanging – the very criteria we have come to attribute to an object of knowledge. In previous dialogues the forms have had the power to act on things (e.g. *Phaedo* 79, *Republic* 508 and 511, *Phaedrus* 247) and in this manner could be said to enter the world of cause and effect. Until now the forms, though affecting particulars, have not been subject to change themselves.

Ross contends that such an assertion does not highlight a sudden change in Plato's conception of forms, rather, Plato has simply extended the parameters of what is considered 'being' to include things that change. Ross suggests that Plato's intention is to assert that "minds subject to change...(can)...also be accepted as completely real" [Ross, 1951, p.110]. Hence, Plato is not suggesting that what is real is somehow both changing and unchanging, "but that both unchanging Ideas and changing minds are perfectly real" [Ross, 1951, p.110] i.e. both unchanging forms and changing minds are real. Ross' argument would seem to offer a solution to the conundrum. Unfortunately, it seems fairly clear in the text that it is forms and their status which appear to be in contention.

It could alternatively be argued that being is of a different nature to other forms in that all must partake of being. However, such a conclusion does not necessarily rescue the argument, as it could be claimed that just as being (i.e. existence) must be a characteristic of all forms, so must other things, according to Plato's reasoning. For example, Plato suggests that all things must partake of the good, and all physical things must partake of greatness etc. In addition, in the early dialogues from the *Cratylus*¹⁴⁰ onwards, knowledge has consistently been identified with that which cannot change.

¹⁴⁰ In which the notion that true knowledge is derived from the form first occurs.

5.2.3.4. *Rejection of Forms?*

Such reasoning has tempted commentators to ask whether Plato has thoroughly abandoned the forms of the middle dialogues in this later period, for the classes, subclasses and species appear to be far removed from the forms of the middle dialogues. Determining what forms are, or could be, and their characteristics in these later dialogues is no easy task, a fact well illustrated if we turn to the *Philebus* (16ff).

In this dialogue there is no talk of 'forms', but rather of four classes: first, the 'finite' or 'limited' which contains "the equal, or again, the double, or any other ratio of number and measure" [Philebus, 25, 1892, Vol. 4, p.591]; second, the 'infinite' or 'unlimited' which contains qualities such as hotter and colder; third, 'mixture' ("which is a compound out of them" [Philebus, 23, 1892, Vol. 4, p.589]) and contains unlimited qualities ('drier', 'wetter' etc) combined with finite qualities; and fourth, 'cause' (which causes the mixture), which is equated with mind; "the mind is the parent of that class...which we called the cause of all" [Philebus, 30, 1892, Vol. 4, p.599].

Terminology such as this is unfamiliar and does not immediately lead us to forms. Consequently, "it has been much debated in which of these classes, if any, the Ideas are to be placed" [Ross, 1951, p.132]. Opinions on the matter are divided. For example, Grube holds that the "Forms are identified with the limiting factor" [Grube, 1935, p.45]. This he concludes from the inclusion of the equal in this class, which we have formerly understood to be a form, providing "fixed standards in contrast to the multiplicity and change in the sensible world" [Ross, 1951, p.135]. Grube argues that adopting this approach does not change earlier constructs, but helps to account for participation. Thus, this new terminology "is not meant to supersede, but to explain" [Grube, 1935, p.45] the forms. He asserts that the argument in the *Philebus* is built upon the existence of forms, and that forms are "clearly Ideas in the same sense as they ever were" [Grube, 1935, p.47]. He supports his thesis, citing later sections of the dialogue in which forms appear in a more familiar manner. By way of example, he quotes the following passages: first, that "knowledge...has to do with being and

reality, and sameness and unchangeableness” [Philebus, 58, 1892, Vol. 4, p.633]; second, that the “man who understands justice, and has reason as well as understanding about the true nature of this and of all other things” [Philebus, 62, 1892, Vol. 4, p.638]; and third, the most revelatory of the forms, that “if we are not able to hunt the good with one idea only, with three we may catch our prey; Beauty, Symmetry, Truth” [Philebus, 65, 1892, Vol. 4, p.642]. Citing these examples, all of which imply forms, he rests his case, believing that “the whole formula of limit, unlimited, mixture and cause is but a general formula to cover every particular case of...participation” [Grube, 1935, p.45]. However, this is not the only class that forms appear to be contained in, and Ross points out that there are certain forms “which we can well suppose Plato to have thought of as being or depending on a ratio between elements” [Ross, 1951, p.135]. Hence, a simple equation of forms with one class or another is not straightforward, leading Ross to conclude that Plato is not talking about forms at all.

Given the introduction of such different terminology and constructions in these later dialogues, we might be tempted to conclude that the forms of the middle period have been abandoned in favour of a new conception of natural constructs which do not have the difficulties of the forms in the middle period. However, such a conclusion is more or less prohibited, or certainly threatened, by the appearance of what seem very much like middle period forms in the *Timaeus*.

5.2.3.5. Continuation of Forms

It is the *Timaeus* that ensures that the forms of the middle period cannot be dismissed, despite the transformations which they have undergone.

In this penultimate dialogue, the forms are the model which the good creator, the demiurge, uses to create the universe. The forms (that which “always is and has no becoming...that which is apprehended by intelligence and reason is always in the same state” [Timaeus, 27, 1892, Vol. 3, p.448]) are looked to by the demiurge as a pattern for the world. The creator looked to a perfect model, to an “unchangeable pattern” [Timaeus, 28, 1892, Vol. 3, p.448] to

the “eternal; for the world is the fairest of creations and he is the best of causes” [Timaeus, 29, 1892, Vol. 3, p.449], in order to make the universe as good as possible, though he is constrained by necessity. Consequently, the world is analogous to the “eternal things themselves” [Timaeus, 29, 1892, Vol. 3, p.449], which are everlasting and intelligible. Thus, the forms in this dialogue have the characteristics of forms from the middle period, and “‘the good’ emerges as the unifying principle of all existence, both forms and physical things” [Rowe, 1984, p.63].

Having said this, there clearly are certain changes. In particular, the forms are now at a vast distance from human beings, and they are no longer the effective cause but distant models out of human reach. Furthermore, like other later dialogues, there is far more interest in sensible things and the natural world. This said, the forms, in particular the good, are very much in evidence, and “Ideas are still the supreme reality after which the world is made” [Grube, 1935, p.47].

Likewise, the forms appear (albeit very briefly) in the last dialogue of the *Laws*. The *Laws* is entirely concerned with political theory and law, and hence the forms are hardly mentioned at all. However, there is allusion to them in a discussion of virtue. Forms seem to be what Plato is indicating when he speaks of justice, virtue and “the good and honourable” [Laws, 966, 1892, Vol. 5, p.357]. He asserts that the guardians must know not only “that each of them is many...(but)...also...they are one” [Laws, 966, 1892, Vol. 5, p.357]. Thus, the forms remain to the last (albeit questioned and criticised), and they continue to be crucial to Plato’s philosophy.

5.2.3.6. Summary

Forms in this late period have certainly undergone change. Plato’s interest has shifted to natural forms, and the material world appears to be more important. Middle characteristics, those of separation and unchangingness, are not emphasised, and are sometimes overtly

rejected. However, despite the changes it seems rash to say that Plato has abandoned the forms, especially in light of their presence in the *Timaeus* and the *Laws*.

5.3. Participation

Clearly the main reason that Plato develops his concept of forms is to supply certainty and knowledge. However, there are problems with the forms: principally, there is the problem of how the particular participates in the form. This central question of participation, or of the one and the many, flows throughout Plato's work and is clearly part of his ongoing thinking about the forms. Questions about how parts of a quality relate to the whole appear in his very first dialogue, the *Laches*¹⁴¹, and remain to the very end of his days and are present in the last dialogue of the *Laws*¹⁴².

5.3.1. Particulars and the Forms

In the early dialogues the concerns about the nature of the relation between common qualities (the precursors of forms) and particulars are already beginning, manifested in the *Laches* (see above) and in the *Lysis* (217ff)¹⁴³. Thus, even though in this period of Plato's thought forms are not yet present, he is already concerned with particulars and their properties – a concern which is solved by the forms¹⁴⁴, but bedevilled by the problem of participation.

In the middle dialogues, when forms are at their clearest and most distinct from particulars, the manner in which particulars participate in forms is at its most complex. Plato does not

¹⁴¹ In which the relation of courage to the rest of virtue is raised, and it is noted that courage includes "not only the knowledge of the hopeful and the fearful, but seems to include nearly every good and evil without reference to time" [*Laches*, 119, Vol. 1, p.109].

¹⁴² See Section 963ff in which Plato talks about virtue being both four and one.

¹⁴³ In which Plato discusses the quality of whiteness, which is distinct from the appearance of whiteness. He contrasts hair which is dyed white, and therefore has the appearance of whiteness but is not really white, from hair which when "old age infuses whiteness into them, then they become assimilated and are white by presence of white" [*Lysis*, 217, Vol. 1, p.67]. The white dye is a quality of white which is a source for the particular to take on that quality, without being a property of the quality. In contrast, the whiteness of hair in old age is a property of the hair itself rather than being white because of the presence of another quality.

¹⁴⁴ In that participation in forms answers why objects have the properties they do.

outline any concrete means by which participation is conceived, but various methods are suggested by the terminology of the dialogues. For example, the discussion of the equal in the *Phaedo* (74ff) suggests that one is reminded of the perfect forms by imperfect particulars – there is an “association by resemblance” [Ross, 1951, p.23]. Resemblance and imitation suggest a distance and the separation of forms and particulars associated with the middle dialogues, but there are also other terms that Plato employs. For example, in his discussion of the beautiful, in the same dialogue (100ff), Plato uses vocabulary of presence and participation, which is not distant, but places the form within the particular. Nehamas argues that “his language shows his uncertainty about that relation” [Nehamas, 1973, p.465], and Plato does move between different conceptions, even in the same dialogue.

Scholars adopt different conclusions as to which solution Plato favoured (or even which solution Plato should have favoured). For example, Grube asserts that the connections of universals to instances in the early dialogues is Plato’s intended means of connection throughout. Therefore, Grube’s contention is that participation is simply meant to denote that instances should be associated with universals, for if “we have grasped the universal we shall be able to give an intelligible account also of the particular instance” [Grube, 1935, p.19]. Others¹⁴⁵ maintain that such a reading does not take seriously the transcendence of the forms which separates them from their instances, nor does it account for how, if forms are connected to particulars merely as universals, they could be their causes. Grube himself appears to have no difficulty marrying forms as universals with the recognition that forms are “unique, stable and eternal” [Grube, 1935, p.20]. Yet, even if it is possible to sustain a conception of universals as stable and eternal (which is by no means beyond criticism¹⁴⁶), it seems impossible that he can maintain forms as separate, transcendent and the causes of particulars. Thus, Grube’s thesis is problematic, although it is possible to read all the forms in this way and so avoid the difficulties of participation. However, one can only do this if one is prepared to reject certain characteristics of the middle dialogue forms and the

¹⁴⁵ For example, Rowe.

¹⁴⁶ Universals as the abstract notions which go to make up our concepts are determined by what we choose to abstract from, rather than the other way around. Hence, they contingently, rather than necessarily, exist.

certainty and knowledge which such characteristics ensure. For example, if 'good' comes from generalisations of good actions, then its essence changes from group to group. Conversely, a necessarily existent good remains the same, although it may be perceived differently by different groups, and so 'good' actions in groups could differ. Thus, even though the appearance of how a group regarded a 'good' act might be the same, the way they conceived of goodness and reality would be quite different, a fact which according to realists would change people's moral actions¹⁴⁷.

5.3.2. Criticisms of the *Parmenides*

Plato was obviously well aware of the difficulties which surrounded the participation of particulars in forms, and in the last dialogue of the middle period¹⁴⁸, the *Parmenides*, he examines possible means of participation and the problems with them. In fact, he raises many of the objections that were later used as arguments against forms. In the *Parmenides* a young Socrates describes his forms to the older philosopher Parmenides. Parmenides criticises his thesis, arguing "first against the 'separate forms' in general, then against two elucidations of the theory offered by Socrates and finally again against the theory in general" [Shorey, 1982, p.26]. The dialogue presents five major criticisms of different permutations of the participation relationship.

First, the notion of a literal participation is addressed. Parmenides argues that if particulars participate in forms in a literal sense, then either the form will exist as a whole, as 'one' in itself, and at the same time in many, and "therefore be in a state of separation from itself" [Parmenides, 131, 1892, Vol. 4, p.50]. Or, if part of the idea is present in every form, it will be many as it is divided among particulars. The first way separates the form from itself, meaning that it is no longer absolute, simple and unchanging, and therefore not a form as originally outlined, a fate which also occurs if a form is divided; it becomes particulars not a

¹⁴⁷ See Chapter One.

¹⁴⁸ For the purpose of this study it is assumed that the *Theatetus* is from the later period. This is a contentious reading (as are the positions of most dialogues). The characteristics of forms it portrays are akin to the later period, and consequently it is included in this period in preference to including it in the middle dialogues.

form. To clarify his position, Parmenides uses the examples of greatness and smallness, pointing out that if the form of greatness was divided, the portion would be less than absolute greatness, and if smallness likewise was divided, then it would be smaller than absolutely small. In this manner, then, Parmenides “demonstrates that there is no way in which individual things can participate in the forms without destroying the absolute unity of the forms” [Shorey, 1982, p.26].

Second, Parmenides introduces the ‘third man’ argument (a criticism, which more than any other, has dogged the forms, and according to Aristotle was a topic of hot debate in the Academy). Parmenides asks Socrates to examine his method for arriving at the forms; “you see a number of great objects, and when you look at them there seems to you to be one and the same idea (or nature) in them all; hence you conceive of greatness as one” [Parmenides, 132, 1892, Vol. 4, p.51] i.e. the method of generalisation. However, when you have a concept of the ideas of greatness, as distinct from great things, and you compare the two, “will not another greatness arise, which will appear to be the source of all these” [Parmenides, 132, 1892, Vol. 4, p.51]. Socrates consents. Parmenides then proceeds that if this occurred, when looking for a source of a particular instance of greatness, absolute greatness and the new form of greatness, another form of greatness will be posited “over and above all these, by virtue of which they will be great, and so each idea instead of being one will be infinitely multiplied” [Parmenides, 132, 1892, Vol. 4, p.52]. Thus, the concept of forms leads to an infinite regress, destroying the concept of a single absolute form and ceasing to provide the ontological source of the particulars.

Next, Parmenides criticises Socrates’ attempt to reformulate the forms as “thoughts only...(which)...have no proper existence except in our minds...for in that case each idea may still be one, and not experience this infinite multiplication” [Parmenides, 132, 1892, Vol. 4, p.52]. Parmenides counters this suggestion by pointing out that a thought must have an object; it cannot be of nothing. Socrates accepts this criticism, and the conception of forms as concepts is quickly dismissed.

Fourth is the notion that particulars partake of forms by resemblance; that forms are “patterns fixed in nature, and other things are like them, and resemblances of them – what is meant by the participation of other things in the ideas, is really assimilation to them” [Parmenides, 132, 1892, Vol. 4, p.32]. Parmenides pronounces that this proposition is as equally vulnerable to the third man argument, for, if the particulars resemble the forms, so will the forms be like, and resemble the particulars. They will share a likeness, and consequently, “if they are alike, some further idea of likeness will always be coming to light” [Parmenides, 133, 1892, Vol. 4, p.53]. As before, this will continue *ad infinitum*.

The final criticism Parmenides levels at the forms is that “these ideas, being such as we say they ought to be, must remain unknown” [Parmenides, 133, 1892, Vol. 4, p.53]. He contends that “their essence is determined by a relation among themselves and has nothing to do with...our sphere...and the things which are within our sphere...are likewise only relative to one another, and not to the ideas which have the same names as them” [Parmenides, 133, 1892, Vol. 4, pp.53-54]. Forms, he concludes, are so different from the instances which we experience that it is impossible for us to have understanding and knowledge of them. Conversely, the forms of absolute knowledge – beauty etc. – will have no knowledge of human things. For, “the ideas are not valid in relation to human things; nor human things in relation to them; the relations of either are limited to their respective spheres” [Parmenides, 134, 1892, Vol. 4, p.55].

5.3.3. Possible Solutions

These criticisms of participation are, and remain, unaddressed by Plato, both here and in future dialogues. However, Plato continued to use forms even though their characteristics are markedly different in the later dialogues. It may be that Parmenides’ final word on the forms is revealing of Plato’s own position:

If a man, fixing his attention on these and like difficulties, does away with ideas of things and will not admit that every individual thing has its own determinant idea which is always one and the same, he will have nothing on which his mind can rest; and so he

will utterly destroy the power of reasoning. [Parmenides, 135, 1892, Vol. 4, p.56]

Thus, it may be that despite the difficulties in establishing a satisfactory method of participation, Plato still regarded the forms as essential for a true description of reality.

Later commentators have been less impressed by the arguments used against Socrates' forms in the *Parmenides* than the young Socrates was portrayed as being. For example, Grube comments that Parmenides' first criticism is based on a misconception that the forms are material objects. Only if considered 'things' which are divisible in a physical way does this argument hold water, and as Plato's forms are intelligible, not material, such a criticism should have been easily dismissed. A similar line of reasoning can be used to throw doubt on the success of the third man argument, and Ross maintains that it is "in fact fatal, not to the theory of ideas, but to the language in which Plato has formulated it" [Ross, 1951, pp.87-88]. He contends that the third man is based on a literal reading of the words 'share' and 'partake', which treats the forms as 'things' in a material sense. Ross argues that there is no evidence for viewing forms in this manner, and if forms are not seen as material then the argument fails. Likewise, Ross is unconvinced with the second version of this argument based around the concept of resemblance. He suggests that Plato "realised that 'copying' was only a metaphorical way of describing the relation" [Ross, 1951, p.89] of forms and particulars. As before, Ross is critical of the inadequate language used, rather than the thesis itself. Furthermore, he considers Parmenides' response flawed on the grounds that "it is, of course, the plain truth that a good thing is not like, and therefore not a copy of, goodness" [Ross, 1951, p.89]. In addition, it is important to note that in his penultimate dialogue of the *Timaeus*, Plato adopts reflection as the means by which particulars partake of forms. Therefore, despite the prominence that the third man received at the Academy, for some reason either Plato was unconvinced and he continued to believe in the truth of his picture, even though he had not discovered a fully adequate account of participation.

Furthermore, there are objections which can be raised against the criticism that forms cannot be thoughts in the mind alone. Shorey, for example, is surprised by the fact that Plato in this

passage “does not divide affection of the mind into ‘sensible things’ and ‘intelligible things’ but assumes that ‘thoughts’ are in the mind and quite simply locates (sic) of ‘sensible things’...outside the mind” [Shorey, 1982, p.27]. In the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*, forms are intelligible objects, distinct entities, but certainly not material things. Rowe also raises this objection, asserting that although a thought must certainly be about something, “clearly this need not be an independently subsisting object” [Rowe, p.73, 1984]. Perhaps one could argue that the success of this criticism is dependent upon the Greek mind-set within which it was more effective. Visualising forms as thoughts or concepts has been adopted by later thinkers, and Shorey suggests that this may be the “solution...(to)...the difficulty of the relationship between forms and things” [Shorey, 1982, p.27].

Nonetheless, these solutions were not adopted by Plato in the dialogues, although the fact that he continued to postulate forms must reveal something. Clearly participation and the relationship of the many to the one was one of the recurring themes in his philosophy, and his frustration is shown clearly in a passage from the *Philebus* in a discussion to determine whether “man is one, or ox is one, or beauty is one, or the good one” [Philebus, 15, 1892, Vol. 4, p.580]. Socrates asks:

Whether these unities have a real existence; and then how each individual unity, being always the same, and incapable either of generation or of destruction, but retaining a permanent individuality, can be conceived of either as dispersed and multiplied in the infinity of the world of generation, or as still entire and yet divided from itself, which later would seem the greatest impossibility of all, for how can one and the same thing be at the same time in one and many things. [Philebus, 15, 1892, Vol. 4, p.580]

5.3.4. Summary

The problem of participation is present in all of Plato’s dealings with forms, although in many ways the most significant fact is that, despite recognising the difficulties, Plato continued to use forms as the most accurate depiction of reality. Although he could never find an entirely satisfactory way of accounting for the reality of forms and their role vis-à-vis

particulars, he continued to believe that conceiving of forms as the source of, and present in, particular instances was the nearest he could get to a correct description of reality. Murdoch shares this conviction and takes from Plato this certainty that values exist in particulars and yet transcend them.

5.4. Connection between Forms

The participation of forms in each other is equally a complex issue, and Plato clearly has great difficulty accounting for the way that forms, particularly of natural objects, relate to each other. This is shown as early as the *Phaedo* (96ff) (“the official document introducing the Forms” [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.26]), in which the issue of how particulars can participate in opposite forms is raised. Just as Plato tries various formulae of participation between forms and particulars, he also tries different methods to account for the relationship between forms and forms. The two most notable are found in the *Republic* and the *Sophist*.

5.4.1. Hierarchy

The first framework by which forms relate is found in the *Republic*. Here the forms are ordered into a hierarchy in which the good is the hypothetical first principle from which all ethical and scientific principles are derived. Ostenfeld interprets this statement concerning the position of the good as implying “the ordering of forms into a teleological system” [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.34], a contention with which Rowe would agree, holding that “*all* forms are somehow related to each other, as parts of a whole” [Rowe, 1984, p.66]. Grube similarly holds that a system of forms is implied in which the narrowest forms are placed below the forms “of the widest application...(which)...are the most fundamental, the highest place of all being claimed for the Idea of the good” [Grube, 1935, p.30].

Shorey proclaims that this hierarchy is the most likely way that Plato conceived of the forms connecting. The “pre-eminent position” [Shorey, 1982, p.54] of the good, he insists, was maintained throughout Plato’s work, and this is borne out in the much later work of the

Timaeus. In this later dialogue, Shorey postulates that “the Demiurge himself becomes good by the ‘presence’ of the form of the good” [Shorey, 1982, p.55]. Hence, as in the *Republic*, good is the cause of the world, the source of both the nature of the forms and the world:

For the form of the good is ‘sketched out’ in terms of beauty, symmetry and truth. But ultimately it is those things made in the likeness of the forms which are beautiful, those things on which the forms have been imprinted that are well-arranged, those things pertaining to knowledge of the forms which are true. In this way all the causal force of the forms is brought back to the one form of the good, which was the cause of action for the Demiurge when he intended to make all things good and was the cause of the ‘presence’ of the forms in the things on which the forms were imprinted. [Shorey, 1982, p.55]

However, despite Shorey’s allegations, certainty with regard to a hierarchy of forms is not available, though, as we have noted, some passages do at least imply one; passages such as the *Republic*’s presentation of the forms of the good where good is pictured as “pervading the whole domain of genuine objects exhibiting order and harmony...(and it)...enable[s] us to have a comprehensive view of all the genuine entities in their relationships to each other” [Moravcsik, 1992, p.31]. A hierarchy works well for values (and this is the model which Murdoch uses), however, it is less useful when Plato comes to account for mathematical and physical forms.

5.4.2. Mixture

A further possible means of connection between the forms is suggested in the *Sophist*. In this dialogue it is concluded that motion and rest are both included in the form of being, which raises the question of “how one Form, such as being, can be predicated of two or more other Forms, such as motion and rest” [Ross, 1951, p.112]. The conclusion in this dialogue is that “some things communicate with some things and others not” [*Sophist*, 252, 1892, Vol. 4, p.385]. To illustrate how this is done, an analogy is drawn between the nature of words and the forms. In the example it is pointed out that vowels pervade all words, and combine with consonants in order to enable letters to blend into words. In a similar manner to letters, then, some forms mix and some do not. Therefore, just as vowels are found in all words, so the

connecting forms are found in the “intermixture with all things” [Sophist, 253, 1892, Vol. 4, p.386].

This idea of connection is very different from the notion of hierarchy, and the forms here are beginning to look like “a spider’s web rather than as isolated units” [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.56]. The notion of forms intermixing fits in well with the concepts in the later dialogues of class, subclass and species. Forms at this stage, as Ross declares, “are neither a collection of entities standing in no positive relations to each other, nor yet are...(they)...capable of entering all sorts of relations to one another” [Ross, 1951, p.116]. Ross argues that this notion of connection between the forms indicates “a process that may be carried much farther – to the establishment of one or other of two relations, predictability or non-predictability, between each pair of Forms and thus to a map – a rather abstract map, it must be admitted – of the world of Forms” [Ross, 1951, p.116].

5.4.3. Summary

Despite these possible connection of the forms, no conclusions can be drawn about Plato’s true intentions, for here it is even less easy to decipher Plato’s intention for connection between forms than it is to unearth the characteristics of forms. However, given that this thesis is focused upon moral realism, adopting a hierarchy of forms, presided over by the good, is the most fitting model, and is indeed the one which Murdoch adopts.

5.5. Knowledge

Having examined the forms and their relation to particulars and other forms, the purpose and realism of the forms must be discussed. As noted at the outset of this chapter, the forms are fundamentally and crucially about knowledge and reality. Plato’s prime motivation in ‘doing’ philosophy is to find some way to account for what he believed to be true and real, a quest which ends in the forms, and in particular, in the form of the good. Plato’s

preoccupation with true knowledge is a hallmark of his philosophy, much as the good is. In fact, in the *Republic* knowledge is the child of the good.

5.5.1. Knowledge and Opinion

Plato's preoccupation with knowledge is noticeable throughout his work. The separation of knowledge and opinion, and the insistence that they have different objects, is one of the fundamental principles which leads to the establishment of forms. This tendency is clearly manifested in the *Republic* Book Five (discussed above¹⁴⁹), in which Plato asserts that only philosophers, as opposed to lovers of sights and sounds, can have true knowledge. The separation of reality and appearance reaches its zenith in Book Ten of the *Republic* (596ff). In this passage three 'beds' are in question, the form, the particular bed, and an artist's representation of a bed. In these three there is a descent from reality to appearance; the form of the bed is reality and the painter's copy is "third in the descent from nature" [*Republic*, 597, 1892, Vol. 3, p.310].

The distinction between knowledge and opinion continues in Plato's later work, appearing in the penultimate dialogue of the *Timaeus*, a passage which also explicitly shows the intimate connection between knowledge and the forms¹⁵⁰. In this passage, not only does Plato argue that knowledge is possible because of the existence of the forms, but in this instance he seems to argue that the forms are proven because knowledge is possible.

5.5.2. Forms provide Knowledge

Thus, it is the search for knowledge that leads to the discovery of forms, and Plato offers a partial or fictional account of how they are reached in the *Phaedo* when Socrates accounts for how he arrived at the conception of forms.

¹⁴⁹ See Section 5.2.2.3.

¹⁵⁰ The argument is that if it can be proved that knowledge and opinion are distinct classes, then "there certainly are these self-existent ideas unperceived by sense, and apprehended only by the mind" [*Timaeus*, 51, Vol. 3, p.471]. Hence, "there is one kind of being which is always the same, uncreated and indestructible, never receiving anything into itself from without nor itself going out to any other, but invisible and imperceptible by any sense, and of which the contemplation is granted to intelligence only" [*Timaeus*, 51-52, Vol. 3, p.472].

Socrates recounts that as a youth his hope and ambition was to find a teleological explanation of the world. Thus, he sought a single efficient cause. He thought he had found his answer in the work of Anaxagoras and his elevation of the principle of mind. Yet, he was disappointed when he found that Anaxagoras' underlying causes, like other philosophers of his day, were the natural elements. In the end Socrates failed in his quest to find a teleological explanation, and settled for the next best thing – a method for inquiring into the nature of causes. Socrates failed to explain the universe “by a final cause...and by an efficient cause...so he fell back on the assumption (which he has already made, on other grounds, in earlier dialogues) of formal causes, the Ideas, to account for things being as they are” [Ross, 1951, p.29]. Hence, Plato's claim is that one cannot account for reality by turning to one teleological cause (although at times the good comes close), therefore one must look to the forms as they are the nearest approximation to an overall cause. Murdoch too adopts this line; she does not move to answer questions such as ‘what is the cause of all moral value?’ but insists that we must stay within the boundaries of what is knowable. Experience informs one that values are real and authoritative, and with this one must be content. Any further postulation of ultimate cause goes beyond the evidence and is therefore illusory.

5.5.3. The Doctrine of Recollection

It is to assert the reality of forms that Plato employs the doctrine of ‘recollection’. Recollection, or ‘anamnesis’, makes knowledge possible, because one is remembering that which one knew before birth. In the *Meno* the knowledge in question is geometry. Socrates proves his point that “there is no teaching, but only recollection” [Meno, 82, 1892, Vol. 2, p.41] by questioning a slave boy about the geometry of a square. The boy is able to answer Socrates' question, and because he “did not acquire the knowledge in this life, then he must have learned it at some other time” [Meno, 86, 1892, Vol. 2, p.47]. Thus, the conclusion is that knowledge must have “always existed in the soul” [Meno, 86, 1892, Vol. 2, p.47], and that the soul is immortal. In the *Phaedo*, again, the doctrine of recollection occurs, and again in connection with the immortality of the soul. In this dialogue the fundamental concern of

recollection is explicitly manifested when the doctrine is introduced in order to answer the question “whence did we obtain our knowledge?” [Phaedo, 74, 1892, Vol. 2, p.215]. Thus, it is possible to argue that Plato’s assertion that the “soul had been in some place before existing in the form of man” [Phaedo, 73, 1892, Vol. 2, p.213], is primarily not about the immortality of the soul, but about the reality of knowledge. Picturing the forms as seen before birth establishes them as objects of certain knowledge. This is illustrated in the *Phaedo* when it is concluded pre-birth knowledge of the equal can be extrapolated to knowledge of other forms, thus:

if we acquired this knowledge before we were born, and were born, having the use of it, then we also knew before we were born and at the instant of birth not only the equal or the greater or the less, but all other ideas; for we are not speaking only of equality, but of beauty, goodness, justice, holiness, and of all which we stamp with the name of essence in the dialectical process. [Phaedo, 75, 1892, Vol. 2, p.217]

Therefore, the doctrine of recollection is a device employed to establish the certainty and realism of the forms. This method recurs in the *Phaedrus* when knowledge is again explained in the statement that we:

must have intelligence of universals, and be able to proceed from the many particulars of sense to conception of reason; this is the recollection of those things which our soul once saw. [Phaedrus, 249, 1892, Vol. 1, p.455]

Recollection recurs throughout Plato’s dialogues, and is important not with regard to the immortality of the soul, but for what it reveals about the reality of forms. The concept of recollection, whether interpreted as describing pre-birth experience or as a mythical way of asserting the possibility of knowledge, shows the certainty and reality which Plato attributed to the forms. Therefore, recollection is important precisely because it reveals the possibility of certain knowledge.

5.5.4. Summary

The search for knowledge then, is the primary factor which draws Plato to the forms and to a realist conception of value. Knowledge and certainty – ‘realism’ in modern terminology – is found in the forms. Thus, the forms are the impetus for Plato’s philosophy, its grounding and its end point. Clearly the certainty of the middle period forms were questioned by Plato in the later period. When the forms are less certain, so is knowledge, and methods of generalisation and division (methods which lack the certainty of dialectic) are returned to. However, in the *Timaeus* the forms return and, as in the *Republic*, the form of the good is pictured as being part of the very fabric of reality.

5.6. The Form of the Good

The ability to provide knowledge of reality is one of the key characteristics of the form of the good which appears in the *Republic*. In this dialogue, Plato presents his most optimistic account of attaining true knowledge. Generalisation as the methodology for forms is not advocated, nor is approximate knowledge accepted, for “only a principle that is absolutely self-luminous will satisfy him” [Ross, 1951, p.58]. The ‘first principle’ of the good ensures an unparalleled certainty which does not “need nor admit proof” [Ross, 1951, p.58]. Consequently, knowledge is possible and the “task of philosophy now becomes that of providing a complete map of the articulations of reality” [Rowe, 1984, p.66]. Thus, knowledge and the form of the good are intimately connected in that knowledge is possible because the good is real.

Initially, the good is described as the “the highest form of knowledge” [Republic, 504, 1974, p.302], rather than “justice and the other qualities we discussed” [Republic, 504d, 1974, p.302]. For, it is the “form of the good, from which things that are just and so on derive their usefulness and value” [Republic, 505a, 1974, p.303]. In this passage it is the form of the good which appears to make knowledge possible, for without it “the rest of our knowledge,

however perfect, can be of no benefit to us, just as it's no good possessing *anything* if you can't get any good out of it" [Republic, 505a, 1974, p.303].

In this passage Plato comes as close as he ever does to defining the form of the good, or any form for that matter. However, because the good is "difficult to grasp" [Republic, 505e, 1974, p.304], Socrates proceeds not to describe the good itself, a task which he protests is beyond him, but rather agrees to divulge his opinion of the "child of the good...(which)...resemble(s) it very closely" [Republic, 506e, 1974, p.305]. From the text, what Socrates appears to mean by the child of the good is truth and knowledge, of which he says "it is right to think of...as being like the good, but wrong to think of either of them as being the good, whose position must be ranked still higher" [Republic, 509a, 1974, p.309]. Thus, not only does the form of the good enable knowledge, but it also seems that from knowledge it is possible to learn about its parent, the good.

In order to support this conception of the good as the fount of knowledge, Socrates turns to ordinary experience and asserts that just as in everyday life one must know the goodness or value of the things one possesses and desires in order to make use of them, so, correspondingly, in the realm of knowledge one must know what is good if one is to discriminate between and order values. As a consequence, he claims that good alone is valued for itself, whereas all other things are valued for their consequences or appearance. The good, then, he separates from all other virtues, as other virtues can be desired for their appearance instead of their reality (e.g. the case of justice in Book One). In the case of goodness, however, the reality, not the appearance, is always desired, for, "whether it's a matter of possession and action or of reputation...no one is satisfied to have something that only *appears* to be good, but wants something that *really* is" [Republic, 505d, 1974, p.304]. Goodness is always desirable for itself, a fact which leads Socrates to claim that "the good, then, is the end of all endeavour, the object on which every heart is set" [Republic, 505e, 1974, p.304]. Thus, goodness is necessary for everyday knowledge as it enables one to know and compare objects and situations.

Furthermore, this section of the *Republic* offers a possible model for conceiving of the ascent of knowledge, which culminates in knowledge of the form of the good. This Socrates does in the second and third images he uses to describe the form of the good. Having drawn the analogy of the sun and the good¹⁵¹, Socrates then proceeds ostensibly to “finish off the analogy with the sun” [Republic, 509e, 1974, p.309] using the image of the ‘Divided Line’.

5.6.1. The Divided Line and the Cave

5.6.1.1. The Divided Line

The divided line begins with a reiteration of the sun and the good as “two powers...one of them is supreme over everything in the intelligible order or region, the other over everything in the visible region” [Republic, 509d, 1974, p.312]. These two realms he depicts as a line that is unequally divided, splitting the intelligible from the visible, the largest section representing the intelligible and the lower, smaller section representing the visible. Next, these two sections are subdivided again unequally into two, leaving four sections. He then numbers the sections and describes what is in each section. The lowest section (the smallest section of the visible realm) becomes D and represents ‘images’, by which he means, “first shadows, then reflections in water and other close-grained, polished surfaces, and all that sort of thing” [Republic, 510a, 1974, p.312]. Section C – the largest section in the visible realm – contains the objects which are the originals of the images in Section D. In the intelligible realm, Section B (the smaller section in the intelligible realm), the original objects of Section C are recognised as images of intelligible objects. Section A, the largest section of all, contains no sensible objects, not even images, and moves from the assumptions of Section B to first principles. This highest endeavour does not utilise “the images used in the other sub-section, but pursuing its inquiry solely by and through forms themselves” [Republic, 510b, 1974, p.313]. Thus, Section A contains the objects of the highest form of knowledge, the forms themselves, which are entirely in the intelligible realm. To clarify the contents of Sections A and B, Socrates turns to mathematics for

¹⁵¹ Republic, 508-509. See Section 5.2.2.7.

assistance. He equates mathematical reasoning with Section B because mathematicians use diagrams and visible figures of objects to represent the originals. For example, they use a diagram of a triangle not to represent a particular triangle but to represent, triangle, in general. Hence, although diagrams and objects are utilised, they are not thought to be real, but exist only in the mind's eye. Yet, although mathematicians do not treat objects as originals but as images, they have not reached the highest form of knowledge. They do know the true objects of thought, the forms, because they do not start from first principles but from assumptions. Socrates is critical of the assumptions mathematicians adopt – such as “there are odd and even numbers, geometrical figures and the three forms of angle” [Republic, 510c, 1974, p.313] – because they do not explain them, considering that they are obvious to everyone. It is this reliance on assumptions which limits mathematics to Section B – content to use images of the forms rather than the forms themselves. This relationship is paralleled in the visual realm where Section D contains the images of the sensible objects contained in Section C. Section A is the province of the philosopher, and certainly the philosopher-king whose task it is to negotiate past assumptions and images, and to reach the forms themselves. The methodology Socrates proposes for the philosopher's task is dialectic, in that it “treats assumptions not as principles, but as...steps in the ascent to something which involves no assumption and is the first principle of everything” [Republic, 511b, 1974, p.314]. Socrates' contention is that once this first principle is known then the thinker is at liberty to descend and form a concrete conclusion from which other knowledge can be deduced. Socrates emphasises that this “whole procedure involves nothing in the sensible world, but moves solely through forms to forms, and finishes with forms” [Republic, 511b-c, 1974, p.314].

The image of the ‘divided line’ has been assumed in “orthodox or traditional interpretation” [Cross and Woosley, 1966, p.208] to be primarily a depiction of levels of knowledge “arranged in an ascending scale of clarity, with corresponding to them, four classes of objects arranged in an ascending scale of truth and reality” [Cross and Woosley, 1966, p.208]. Thus, one proceeds from Section D, the lowest level of knowledge, to Section A, the

highest level of knowledge. Conceived of in this manner, the line depicts four stages of intelligence or levels of knowledge through which “the human mind must pass if it is to reach perfect knowledge of that which is completely real” [Cross and Woosley, 1966, p.208]. This four-fold picture of states of knowledge is judged in the traditional interpretation to be the most significant meaning of the line; the fact that it continues the intelligible/visible analogy of the sun is, at best, secondary.

Such an interpretation suggests that knowledge of the forms, of reality, begins in the sensible world from which one progresses to the intelligible. The progression appears to be continuous, a fact implied by the use of one line rather than two and the position of mathematics as a link between the visible and the intelligible. However, interpreting the image in this manner runs contrary to Plato’s professed intention, that of expanding the simile of the sun and his intention to reveal the nature of the good, or of knowledge, the child of the good. In addition, taking the line as a continuous progression ends the analogy which divides the sensible and intelligible. In order to discover the correct reading of the line we turn to Plato’s third image which is Murdoch’s favourite; the cave.

5.6.1.2. The Cave

The myth of the cave begins in Book Seven of the *Republic*, following on directly from the sun and the divided line.

Socrates describes an underground chamber in which there are prisoners who have been so since childhood. These prisoners are facing the back wall of the cave, fastened by their legs and necks so that they are unable to turn and can only look straight in front of them. Behind the prisoners burns a fire (which is the source of light in this underground world), and between the fire and the prisoners runs a road, along which people are walking, talking, carrying things etc. The shadows of these people going about their business are reflected onto the back wall of the cave towards which the prisoners face. Naturally, the prisoners

assume that the shadows they see are real people and objects, and they conclude that the voices and noises which they hear originate from the shadows.

From this sorry, and as Glaucon comments, rather “odd” [Republic, 515a, 1974, p.317] situation of the prisoners in the cave, Socrates moves on to consider what would happen if the prisoners were suddenly released from their bonds. He suggests that if “one of them were let loose, and suddenly compelled to stand up and turn his head and look and walk towards the fire; all these actions would be painful and he would be too dazzled to see properly the objects of which he used to see the shadows” [Republic, 515c-d, 1974, p.318]. The pain and difficulty of this move would lead to such bewilderment that he would be likely to reject the strange things which he was being shown and wish simply to return to his old position. In fact, it would be likely that he would believe the shadows on the cave wall to be more real than the objects which he was now facing. Moreover, if the prisoner was forced to look directly into the fire he would be blinded and caused pain by its brightness, and he would be unable to distinguish objects from each other. Once again, his instinct would be to return to the things that he could see properly. The next stage of the prisoner’s journey would be possible if he were not allowed to return to his shadow-gazing and was “forcibly dragged up the steep and rugged ascent and not let go till he had been dragged out into the sunlight” [Republic, 516a, 1974, p.318]. Again, the process would be painful and the prisoner would be blinded by the light, unable to see the things that he was now told were real. Eventually, the prisoner (or more accurately ex-prisoner) would become accustomed to the light in the upper world and eventually he would be able to recognise the world and its objects as real. This process of gradual awareness would be slow; “first he would find it easiest to look at shadows, next at the reflections of men and other objects in water, and later at the objects themselves. After that he would find it easier to observe the heavenly bodies and the sky itself at night, and to look at the light of the moon and the stars rather than at the sun and its light by day” [Republic, 516a-b, 1974, p.319]. The final and the highest point of this journey is when, after much pain and perseverance, the prisoner is able to lift his head and face the sun itself. Only at this final stage of the quest – facing the sun itself – is it possible for the

prisoner to comprehend the whole landscape; only at this point could the ex-prisoner conclude that “it is the sun that produces the changing seasons and years and controls everything in the visible world, and is in a sense responsible for everything that he and his fellow-prisoners used to see” [Republic, 516b-c, 1974, p.319]. At this stage he realises the lowliness of his state as a prisoner and feels sorry for those still mistaken about the true nature of reality, preferring “anything to a life like theirs” [Republic, 516e, 1974, p.319].

Conversely, if this ex-prisoner returned to the cave he would again become blind, this time from the darkness, and would appear to the remaining prisoners to be a fool as he would be unable to distinguish the shadows on the cave wall clearly. The prisoners would conclude that “his visit to the upper world had ruined his sight, and that the ascent was not even worth attempting” [Republic, 517a, 1974, p.320]. These prisoners, then, unable to comprehend any knowledge or values beyond their own, would therefore resist ascent to the point that they would kill anyone who tried to take them.

Some interpreters, such as Cross and Woosley, argue that the cave too is concerned with levels of knowledge and reality, and held to correspond to the stages of the line. Thus they maintain that:

The line is a map of the country through which the human mind must travel as it progresses from a low degree of intelligence to the highest, while the allegory of the Cave pictures to us the actual journey through the country mapped out in the Line. [Cross and Woosley, 1966, p.208]

Therefore, both images are deemed to be about stages of knowledge: the line literally and the cave dramatically and allegorically. The reasons for such an interpretation are that, like the line, the most significant divide in the cave is the initial divide into two: the underground world representing the visible world and the outside world the intelligible. Furthermore, like the line, both realms subdivide, leaving four stages of progression in the cave similar to the four stages of the line. Also, and obviously, both represent a progression from a state of illusion or appearance to a state of knowledge and enlightenment.

However, there are difficulties with simply harmonising the images of the line and the cave, for when one looks closely the correspondence assumed above is not easy to maintain. Thus, despite the fact that both neatly divide into four sections, there is no obvious match when one comes to compare what should be parallel sections. By way of example, it is exceptionally hard to match the bottom half of the line (Sections C and D) to the cave as Section D in the line contains merely shadows, images and reflections. The section which one would expect to correspond, the lowest section of the cave (in which the prisoners are chained and bound and facing the shadows on the back wall of the cave), does not do so. Instead of representing the mental state depicted in Section D, the cave represents the ordinary human condition. Alternatively, the line represents the ordinary mental state only when one joins Sections C and D, as only together do they cover the whole of ordinary perception.

There are further disanalogies between the line and the cave, notably that the constancy of progression in the line stands in stark contrast to the broken ascent of the prisoner leaving the cave. In the cave, Plato depicts the unenlightened prisoner as deficient of all knowledge. Knowledge is attained not by a gradual building but by dramatic conversions as one is dragged from one level to the next. This differentiation between illusion and knowledge is problematic, as it “creates a sharp cut-off between the state of the enlightened and that of the unenlightened. They do not inhabit the same cognitive world” [Annas, 1981, p.253]. The line displays the natural progression from one cognitive level to another, in which higher levels are built upon previous knowledge of lesser levels. By contrast, movement and progression in the cave is difficult and painful at every stage. The two worlds are contrasted and not continuous. To move upwards in the cave, unlike the line, requires a jump for which one is not prepared; even the initial “release from bonds is an unexplained intervention, not an extension of anything done before” [Annas, 1981, p.254]. Even the division of the cave into four levels is not without difficulties for there appear to be not four but five stages¹⁵² in the cave, for it does not seem to be unreasonable to count the final point when the ex-

¹⁵² Or indeed six if one was to count looking at the people in the cave and facing the fire itself as two separate stages.

prisoner faces the sun, or the form of the good, and finally comprehends the whole picture (516b-c). Perhaps this stage in the cave is paralleled by the 'first principle' of the line, but to ignore what in the text seems to be a new experience from simply seeing the world and its objects seems rash.

As a result of these complications various approaches have been taken to solve these inconsistencies, and scholars contest the tiniest disparities. Some have attempted to make the images fit together more neatly, such as Murphy who suggests a "tripartite version" [Murphy, 1951, p.160]¹⁵³, and A. S. Ferguson who disconnects the cave entirely from the line¹⁵⁴. However, such interpretations are beset with their own difficulties¹⁵⁵.

The primary danger is that all these scholars become embroiled in the mechanisms of comparing stages of knowledge, which leads to a neglect or distortion of the most crucial connection between the good, knowledge and reality. Concentrating upon the minutiae means that they neglect the wider picture. If one looks at the wider picture then these images can be seen to contain the whole of Plato's thesis: the simile of the sun reveals the good and its function as a fundamental cause, the line shows that we can progress to knowledge of the good from which we can know and judge that which is around us, and the cave provides the mystical element.

¹⁵³ Murphy joins together Sections C and D of the line, arguing that Plato used four sections, simply to echo the image/original relationship of Sections A and B, but Sections C and D were not to be taken as separate. Thus, there are three levels of knowledge represented in the line: those of opinion, mathematics and knowledge. His lowest level is now a real level of knowledge – the everyday visible world of sensible objects and their shadows – something that Section D alone could never be. The cave he reduces to three corresponding sections by merging the middle two sections. He conjectures that these two levels may be equivalent, because in the lowest of these levels the prisoner, though still within the cave, has succeeded in looking at solid figures. By contrast, in the next stage, though the prisoner has managed to escape into the sunlight, he has regressed in that he is again reduced to staring at shadows. Therefore, "on balance is not either an advance or a retreat; a change from fire to sun is an improvement but from solid to shadow a decline: so it may well be that the total level, the plus and minus cancelling out, is unchanged" [Murphy, 1951, pp.161-162].

¹⁵⁴ Arguing that the line is, as Socrates promises, a completion of the previous image, thus, "the line simile is a continuation of the Sun simile" [Cross and Woosley, 1966, p.209], and only the top two sections of the line represent true levels of knowledge. The cave he maintains is not concerned with levels of knowledge at all, but is a political analogy.

¹⁵⁵ For example Murphy's division makes any continuation between the simile of the sun and the line impossible and ignores the differences between stages of the cave and interpreting the cave as only being concerned with levels of knowledge. Ferguson does not do much better as he cannot account for the fact that there is only one line, and for the apparent continuity between the higher and lower sections, and therefore, he ignores Plato's own injunction to connect the stages of the cave to the line.

5.6.2. The Good as a Religious Object

In these three images of the good, more than anywhere else in Plato's philosophy the religious nature of his vision is revealed. The difficulties that commentators encounter in their attempts to equate the images are drawn, at least in part, from the fact that they treat the images simply as philosophical riddles to be unravelled. If a religious element is added, and the good is recognised as a religious object as well as a philosophical concept, then the difficulties are greatly lessened, if not entirely removed. For, viewed in this way, Plato is not attempting to construct a philosophical system, but to provide images and allegories which will help the seeker to see the good. Thus, his aim is not to give a water-tight explanation, but to provide illumination and inspiration. Indeed, seen in this light the inconsistencies could be intentional because they ensure that the images cannot be interpreted literally, but must be regarded as mystical guides. In his search for reality Plato does not distinguish between the philosophical and theological quest; the quest for truth is single. To ignore the religious element, especially with regard to the good, reduces the forms and threatens Plato's vision.

Throughout Plato's philosophy there is a constant thread of what contemporary thinkers would describe as mysticism. Commentators often dismiss this as simply a product of the time. Certainly, if Plato had been writing today perhaps he would conform to the norms and conventions of his chosen discipline¹⁵⁶. However, Plato was under no such constraints and was free to pursue truth in all its facets. To deny the religious factor in the search for truth would for Plato have been nonsense. Part of the reality which Plato uncovered was the reality of the forms and the reality of the good. Apprehending the forms was not simply an intellectual task, but it was one in which one's whole being must be involved; shown not just in the *Republic*, but particularly clearly in the ascents described in the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus* and the *Phaedo*. The path to seeing the forms was as much a religious pilgrimage as it was philosophy. In fact, the distinction would have made no sense to Plato.

¹⁵⁶ Although given that his master Socrates was executed for not conforming, this is questionable.

The good is the source of Plato's religious conception. The image of the cave, loved so much by Murdoch, reveals the spiritual and moral struggle involved in reaching the good; a struggle in which faith and conversion is paramount. The process towards the good is not an intellectual process, but one which rips the individual out of one way of being and throws him into another. To reach the sun, and enlightenment, many of these revolutions occur, causing the individual to change and grow, even to the extent that they are blind and dumb to their old interests and ways of life. When the prisoner returns to the cave he is like a prophet who is ignored by his own people. Without a doubt Plato's is a 'religious' vision, and attaining knowledge – the whole purpose of his philosophy – is a religious quest.

The good is the ultimate reality, the source of all truth, (see quote in 5.2.2.7). Thus, the absolute good is the ground of all that is real; that which is 'beyond being' (*epekeina tes ousias* [Republic, 508d-509b]). Only by living in the light of the good can one live a fully real existence. Thus, for Plato the good is both the ultimate religious object and the fundamental ground of moral philosophy.

5.7. Conclusion

It is clear that Plato's forms, though changing and evolving throughout his work, are ever present; they "slowly emerge from the Socratic definition...and then blaze forth in all their glory in the dialogues of the middle period...(and)...remain, until the end of Plato's life" [Grube, 1935, p.48]. The forms encapsulate Plato's belief that knowledge is possible, and that there are some things of which one can be certain, like the reality of the good. Consequently, they constitute "the fundamental hypothesis upon which he based the rest of his philosophy, in spite of the fact that he was well aware of the difficulties which the theory implied" [Grube, 1935, p.48]. Plato's forms must be seen as an assertion of realism and a conviction that knowledge is possible. Those who reject his thesis on the grounds that it posits "extraordinary entities of a sort no *sensible* person would believe in" [Penner, 1936, p.1] must be referring to the "'classical' two-world" [Ostenfeld, 1982, p.76] theory. For, to assert the reality and possibility of certain knowledge, though perhaps controversial, is not

an uncommon wish. It may be that Plato's forms suffer not only from a false notion of what his forms actually are (existing things in another world), but also from Plato's biological and physical use of forms, which modern science would undermine on an atomic and microscopic level; there is no such thing as whiteness, only the appearance of whiteness. However, there is still merit in his ethical forms – and some would even include his mathematical forms – as Murdoch's philosophy clearly shows.

Furthermore, and crucially, Plato's conception of moral value, in particular the good, is integrally religious in that the religious element is the philosophical element, and vice-versa; they are one and the same. The task of knowing the forms, necessary for all types of knowledge, is, in today's language, a religious quest as much as it is a philosophical quest. Knowing what is good and true for Plato involved one's whole person and necessitated a change of life, not just a change in one's thinking.

Chapter Six: An Evaluation of Plato's and Murdoch's Realism

6.1. Introduction

Having discussed the Platonic forms it is now possible to consider Murdoch's Platonism, and particularly to assess her realist proposal and its implications for the relationship between religion and moral value.

6.2. Murdoch's Platonism Assessed

Clearly the Platonic good is the inspiration behind Murdoch's good and, like Plato's good, it is absolute, unchanging, transcendent, and revealed in ordinary experience. There are, however, characteristics of Plato's good which Murdoch does not invoke. For example, Plato further asserts that forms are known to the mind alone, whereas, by contrast, Murdoch does not make a division between the sensible and intelligible worlds. Plato distinguishes between knowledge and opinion, regarding them as separate capacities which have distinct objects. The nearest that Murdoch gets to suggesting a schema in which the mind is superior is her insistence that in order to know the good, one must relinquish egotistical desires and turn towards better objects of attention. Thus, though there is a sense in which Murdoch holds that purely physical desires can prevent one from seeing the good and the real, there is no contrast between knowledge and opinion in her work. Physical objects and everyday situations do provide accurate inklings of value as long as one is not deluded into thinking that the physical exhausts the good. It is, rather, part of the good and a pointer to the good itself. Therefore, there is no sense in Murdoch's work that our senses provide a different source of knowledge from intelligence. Indeed, her claims for art and religious imagery suggest that the physical and emotional parts of human being and knowing are valid communicators of various aspects of reality, which can even be more effective than intellectual means. Unlike Plato, then, for Murdoch there is no separation between the mind and the body, and knowledge of value is derived from the entirety of experience.

The fact that Murdoch does not include this division is largely due to the different contexts in which Plato and Murdoch are writing. Much as they are addressing similar issues and undertaking a similar task – that of attempting to assert the realism of values – the contexts within which they find themselves have marked dissimilarities. In particular, Plato saw no problem in separating the things of the mind from those of the body. However, for Murdoch, in a post-Cartesian world, there are connotations to this dichotomy which had not been realised in Plato's time. Gradually this dualism was exaggerated to the extent that the mind and the body were viewed as totally separate entities. Moreover, they were not only thought of as distinct, but all that was related to the mind was deemed good, whereas all that related to the body was bad. In this manner, the mind was elevated at the expense of the body until the mind and the body were held to be in competition and opposition. This formalised dualism, which presented the two sides as morally opposing, was not limited to the mind and the body but extended to other spheres. As a result of this dualism, the world was divided into opposing spiritual and moral forces: light/dark, mind/body, male/female, God/Devil, and of course Good/Evil. The moral and religious significance of this formalised dualism had devastating consequences for the Western world¹⁵⁷. However, this strident dualism, though often attributed to Plato, is not actually found in his philosophy. Although Plato does distinguish between mind and body, and the intelligible is held to offer true knowledge by which the forms themselves are known, the all-enveloping dualism which succeeded Plato is not present. In Plato's philosophy the relationship between the intelligible and sensible is far more complex, and the notion that knowledge¹⁵⁸ of the real begins in the physical is not absent from his work. Plato presents the physical world as the starting point of recognition for the forms in both the *Symposium* and the *Phaedo*, and from this partial knowledge one can move to a fuller understanding of the absolute form itself. Furthermore, Plato did not ignore the sensible realm, but actually took great interest in it, as discussed in Chapter Five. It is true to say that Plato was wary of bodily desires and feared that people would be seduced into believing that sensual rewards were the ultimate goal. However, a properly

¹⁵⁷ In particular dualism played a large part in the subjection of women and the destruction of the environment, legacies which we are still attempting to rectify.

¹⁵⁸ See the ascent to beauty in the *Symposium*.

balanced person, as shown in the image of the charioteer, is not someone who denies the bodily appetites, but who controls them and keeps them in harmony for the benefit of the whole person. Nonetheless, although Plato's dualism cannot be equated to the dualism which followed, the repercussions of the dualist world-view make contemporary thinkers, including Murdoch, extremely wary of endorsing a dualism of any kind. Moreover, contemporary philosophers are influenced by other disciplines, and recent developments in the sciences, in particular in the social sciences and psychiatry, reinforce the claim that the dualist outlook is erroneous.¹⁵⁹

Thus, these apparent differences between Murdoch and Plato are not significant but due to the fact that their philosophies are informed and influenced by their respective contexts. Murdoch does not distinguish between knowledge and opinion, but she does follow Plato in asserting that the desires must be controlled if one is to see the good. Thus, the apparent discrepancy is one of form rather than content, for Murdoch continues to follow the spirit of Plato's work. Likewise, Murdoch does not speak of moral values as 'causes'. However, if Plato's description of the good in the simile of the sun is taken to mean that goodness is fundamental to all explanations, then the good is certainly a 'cause' for Murdoch. She does not use the term 'cause' because this does not accord with contemporary world-views, however, the reasons Plato gave for such a conception (i.e. the fundamental status of goodness) remains the quintessence of Murdoch's own work.

The change in context, in particular the rejection of dualism, also explains why Murdoch does not use the term 'separate' when speaking of values. Separation figured strongly in Plato's conception of the forms and Plato asserted that the forms, when they are recognised as truly real, are separate from the world of particulars. Murdoch does not suggest such a separation and, as noted above, she implies that recognition of values in particulars is an accurate source of knowledge. Nonetheless, Murdoch's reading is still Platonic, for although Plato does stress separation, there are other passages which signify a continuity between

¹⁵⁹ The connections between the physical and the mental are well attested to in the effects which environments and relationships have upon the mind, and even in the medical profession there are signs that more holistic approaches are making inroads.

knowledge of the particulars and the forms. As was noted in Chapter Five, the exact conception which Plato had of the forms and their relation to particulars is never clarified. There are two elements which pull Plato in opposite directions with regard to participation. On the one hand, he wishes to keep the forms separate in order to assert that they are pure and not qualified or corrupted by the instances in which they participate. He thereby hopes to ensure absolute, objective value. On the other hand, he wishes firmly to link forms to their instances in order to assert that particulars are what they are by virtue of their connection to the forms. Thus, depending upon which aspect is important in the dialogue, he sometimes emphasises separation of forms and on other occasions he focuses on their connection with concrete instances. These two apparently opposing aspects of his work are never completely resolved, and as we saw clearly in the last chapter Plato was aware of the difficulties. However, he maintained both facets of the forms. Thus, though Plato could not provide an adequate model, he continued to try to represent what he obviously held to be the reality of forms, namely, both that they are absolutes and also that they are known in concrete situations. Murdoch does not use the terminology of separation, and therefore could be said to adopt one aspect of Plato's thought rather than the other. Patently, Murdoch's forms are not separate in that she does not separate knowledge from opinion. However, if separation was intended by Plato as a means by which to ensure the absolute status of forms, this is something which Murdoch would also wish to assert. Murdoch's conception remains thoroughly Platonic and, like Plato, she must describe how absolute moral values can be found in particular instances.

6.3. Transcendence and Immanence

Murdoch's attempt to address this conundrum of the 'problem of participation' is found in her claim that the good is simultaneously both transcendent and immanent. The dual aspect of the good is intended to explain how it is possible for absolute value to be present in particular instances. Her thesis, as analysed in Chapter Four, is that transcendence and immanence are not opposites but correlates. Hence, there is no contradiction in stating that the good is absolute and at the same time immanent. However, though dualism has been

rejected, there are underlying dualist assumptions which have not yet been eradicated from philosophy and which make many reluctant to accept the connection she draws between transcendence and immanence. The legacy of the dualism remains embedded in much of contemporary thought and (despite post-modern assertions) it still underpins many basic assumptions, such as the dualism of objective and subjective which remains in philosophy and other academic disciplines. Thus, in order for Murdoch to succeed, she must convince her readers of the fallacy of such an opposition.

The continuation of such assumptions is strange in that certain scholars of moral philosophy¹⁶⁰ have explicitly rejected dualist theories, but have nonetheless remained trapped in dualistic mind-sets. Instead of rejecting the dichotomy which a dualist world-view created, they have tended to simply reject one side of the equation: the 'objective' side. Consequently, they have denied the objective and insisted that all is subjective, a move which leads to relativism and non-cognitivism. Other schools of thought have gone in the opposite direction and rejected the subjective side of the equation, as is the case with divine command theories and fundamentalist religions. Such positions deny any subjective element in moral understanding and assert one objective truth. As a result, both sides, while claiming to reject dualism, have not actually done so. Though they do not appear to propose dualist theories, their tendency to adopt one side of the dualism they claim to reject, rather than attempting a reintegration, ensures that the dichotomy remains in place. Both approaches ultimately lead to misguided viewpoints. Adopting an objective stance leads to the old difficulties of unchanging dogma which is imposed upon human beings and which limits the possibility of truly moral action¹⁶¹. Alternatively, the claim that all is subjective, while releasing humanity from the control of 'outside' factors, opens the path to relativism, which results in a loss of the meaning and significance of moral value, and ignores the phenomenology of moral experience.

¹⁶⁰ For example, relativists.

¹⁶¹ As pointed out so forcibly by the humanist critique of religion. See Section 2.4.

Murdoch takes neither of these paths, but attempts to remove the division, hence her contention that transcendence and immanence are not opposites, but equally part of the same quality. By such means she hopes to integrate both sides of dualism, a project which she deems necessary if one is to account for the full complexity of human experience. However, such an approach is not without difficulty, since the dichotomy between subjective and objective still predominates, either in its traditional form, or because of a one-sided emphasis. Murdoch's thesis runs contrary to such approaches and signals a new method not only for moral philosophy, but for many other disciplines which are still determined by this underlying ideology. If one accepts the thesis that transcendence and immanence are correlates then the problem of participation is solved.

It is clear, therefore, that Murdoch's moral philosophy is thoroughly Platonic, and she has been faithful to his vision of the good both philosophically and theologically. The good is as prominent in her philosophy as it was in his – the source of reality and truth. The quest to see the real and the good for both of them is one which involves one's whole being and is as much religious as it is moral. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that Murdoch has not distorted Plato's vision but has attempted to reclothe it for the contemporary scene. It is true that Murdoch only utilises a part of Plato's philosophy, since she focuses exclusively upon the moral. However, as the good is the centre of all his philosophy this does not distort the picture to any great degree. Moreover, other sections of his philosophy, such as his natural forms, have been superseded, whereas his moral philosophy, as Murdoch's work shows, is still relevant.

6.4. The Ontological Status of the Good

Having noted the similarities between Plato and Murdoch's philosophies it is now possible to return to the difficulties which beset Murdoch's Platonic realism in the hope that some of the key issues may now be resolvable.

To begin with, both Murdoch and Plato make ontological claims about the status of moral values. The question, as before, is exactly how is it possible to conceive of such values. As discussed in Chapter Four, a key obstacle lies in presenting the good as real without conceptualising values as objects. This dilemma applies to Plato no less than it does to Murdoch. Indeed, his critics from Aristotle onwards often envisaged the Platonic forms as objects, though not objects of the sensible world. By adopting a two-world theory, the forms were interpreted as analogous to material objects, and hence thought of in a not dissimilar manner. Such a reading of Plato is rejected by Murdoch, and she is at great pains to avoid a similar interpretation of her own work. Consequently, she emphasises that there is no other-worldly supernatural element to her thought and nothing which suggests that moral values exist as objects in some other realm.

However, though Murdoch wishes to deny that the good is an object, this remains an unresolved issue. In order to establish the good as ever-present in human life she adopts the ontological argument. Her introduction of the ontological argument and ‘necessary existence’ tends to take the reader directly into the old debate about predicates and attributes which has surrounded the ontological argument. Such associations do not aid her endeavours, for the terminology involved – such as possession of attributes – suggests the existence of an object or being to which attributes belong. Therefore, it may be better to disregard Murdoch’s ontological argument as it creates more problems than it solves, while seeking to retain her fundamental point that the good is an essential part of experience. Murdoch’s other arguments, from experience and perfection, and the Platonic degrees of goodness argument, are more helpful and certainly less likely to give the impression that the good is an empirical object.

6.5. The Impersonal Nature of the Good

There are further difficulties associated with her use of the ontological argument, especially concerning the relationship between moral values and religion. Questions such as why the proof works for good, but does not when it is applied to God, need to be answered. As

discussed in Chapter Four, there is only one possible reason which Murdoch gives for why this could be the case which survives criticism, namely, that is that the good is impersonal.

This aspect of the good has caused difficulties for certain scholars¹⁶² who maintain that Plato (and by extension Murdoch) presents a philosophy in which the individual can find no fulfilment. Since the good is impersonal, achieving the end of the quest and seeing the good can have no practical relevance because all that is accomplished is knowing the impersonal good. Yet this reading makes assumptions which Murdoch would not endorse. She would argue that the good is highly relevant to practical decision-making, indeed the most relevant component. Although the good is impersonal, in that it is not an entity with personality, it is not impersonal in that it is irrelevant to the concerns of human beings. As we saw above, the good is at the heart of human meaning. Murdoch's good is impersonal in that it has no character, no fears or desires, therefore there can be no possible cohesion; one must be 'good for nothing'. By this means, Murdoch presents a moral source which is objective but which does not bind the individual in any sense other than it is part of the human condition¹⁶³.

6.6. The Viability of Realism

The question which remains is whether or not Murdoch's Platonic realism is viable. Certainly, she has made a strong case that moral value is 'necessary' and cannot be thought away from the world; that values are essential in the process of ordering and evaluating human life. Murdoch, in conjunction with Plato, has offered a realist model in which the authority of moral value is part of morality itself, relying on no external factors but simply part of the human condition. However, there are elements of her realism which would not fulfil certain realist criteria, such as those set out by Dancy in the first chapter. Murdoch's realism is an argument for values being real as far as human beings are concerned, in that

¹⁶² For example, Annas argues that "the ascent out of the cave offers no personal interest or fulfilment, not even the satisfaction of having shed inauthentic roles" [Annas, 1981, p.259]. Moreover, the "culmination of the whole journey is comprehension of the Form of the Good – and this is precisely not what is good for the seeker, or good for others, or good in relation to anything or anyone, but simply and unqualifiedly good in a way that is completely impersonal and indifferent between individuals" [Annas, 1981, p.259].

¹⁶³ See Section 4.7.6.

values are part of the fabric of reality because they are ever-present. Such values would presumably remain in a world in which human beings were not there to interpret them. However, it is unclear that they would have relevance in such a hypothetical situation. These issues do not trouble Murdoch; values are real as far as human beings are concerned and thus they are real in any meaningful sense. Certainly values are discovered, not invented, in the language of Chapter One, but they are discovered by humans and are active in the human life. However, though her philosophy may not be realist enough to fit Dancy's criteria, it is realist in that values are discovered not made.

Given that Murdoch has denied the premise upon which the criteria of the moral philosophers in the first chapter set up their debate, it would be fair to judge that values can be absolute and real without being disconnected from human beings. To assert that for values to be real they must be independent of human beings, in the sense that values are always there, would be irrelevant, because values are not 'things' in the world but part of the human reality. Furthermore, to suggest that for values to be absolute they must be independent of human beings would be to fall into the objective/subjective divide, because it is based on the assumption that if values are not wholly objective then they must be subjective. Murdoch's insistence that the good is transcendent and immanent makes this distinction obsolete. For her values are real and are discovered in human experience. Thus, they are real in any sense that matters; they are not objects or material things, nor are they pseudo-scientific facts, but they are real and they are absolute.

6.7. The Religious Element of Moral Value

In order to establish her moral realism Murdoch has introduced a religious element to the moral quest, though religion in this sense is never dogmatic. As noted above Murdoch is at pains to show that one should be 'good for nothing'. She insists upon the pointlessness of virtue, yet she also speaks of its supreme point. Clearly the quest to be moral is not a meaningless quest, but in fact is one packed with meaning. Thus, it would seem fair to claim that the kind of moral life envisaged is enriching and rewarding for the individual and for

those around. The moral life is one which has 'depth', and although 'for nothing' in that there are no other-worldly rewards, there do seem to be rewards in the form of a 'better', 'fuller', more human kind of existence, though no doubt a more difficult one.

In making the good impersonal, Murdoch renders impossible elements which many consider fundamental to a religious outlook. For many believers the most important factor of religion is that God, and in particular the incarnated Christ, is personal and offers a unique relationship in which the believer is loved and fully understood. The wish to be understood, completely understood, is for many a compelling reason for the adoption of faith, and this aspect of religion could never be fulfilled by Murdoch's good. However, Murdoch would probably describe such reasons for believing as egotistical and ill-founded. Indeed, she may even regard such hopes as the ultimate consoling illusions, a contention supported by her claims that Buddhism, a religion which is not focused upon a personal God, is the world religion which comes closest to her vision of a 'new religion'. Thus, Murdoch's moral vision, though spiritual, is not a faith in a manner akin to Christianity, and though she regards rejection of such belief as a necessary stage in achieving a true religion, many believers would deny that her suggested demythologised religion can offer a full spiritual path.

Nonetheless, despite Murdoch's insistence that we must avoid delusion and remain focused upon that which can be known from this world from the evidence before us, there are elements in her vision which, if not actually going beyond such limits, are close to doing so. Much as Murdoch emphasises the impersonal nature of the good¹⁶⁴, underlying her whole thesis seems to be the hope that acting morally and living the life she suggests is not pointless. She has discounted the possibility of an external telos, but clearly she hopes that if one lives a moral life one will have a more fulfilled life. Her hope, though never explicitly articulated, is that the Universe, at least the human part of it, is not indifferent to human striving, and that moral effort does bring reward in that it improves the quality of one's own

¹⁶⁴ Essential if Murdoch is to be able to counter the humanist critique and establish the autonomy of morality.

life and of those around. It seems that moral striving towards the good brings a revelation of the religious element of the good or the moral reality. This hope, this faith, remains within the moral sphere¹⁶⁵, yet for many it is a religious premise, a belief in the efficacy of morality that is exalted to religious status. Murdoch continually reminds the reader that morality is for nothing, yet values are obviously of supreme importance. Hence, there is an underlying question of whether without this hope – the belief that attempting to be good is worthwhile – Murdoch's philosophy is threatened. It is possible that the spiritual claims Murdoch is making could be undermined if it were proved that moral striving were irrelevant, and that the good and moral values were not real but invented. Such underlying spiritual propositions have led to many to reject her realist thesis on the ground that they consider her to be basing her philosophy upon a faith claim.

Yet, despite the religious nature of her philosophy, the religious element of her work, though crucial, remains in the background, and it is possible to know the realism of moral values even though one does not proceed to regard the good in the way she suggests to gain 'enlightenment'. At the forefront are always moral values, and the religious elements are subsumed into the moral. In her framework, the religious and the aesthetic elements are so near to the moral that at times distinguishing between the three is almost impossible. Yet, although some disregard her work for being too religious, others, as noted in Chapter Four, take the opposite point of view, maintaining that she is simply reducing religion to morality. Critics of this ilk regard such a move as reductionist, and her methodology of demythologisation as flawed.

Certainly, Murdoch's 'new religion' is open to criticism. In particular her assertion that religion must be demythologised or disappear altogether is not supported by the evidence. Far from disappearing, many traditional religions are gaining converts, and importantly, it is not the liberal demythologised strains which are growing, but the fundamentalist elements which exhort a literal conception. Even within academia, there is a move away from

¹⁶⁵ This hope is reminiscent of Kant's thinking on the subject, in that he likewise holds out the hope that moral endeavour is worthwhile in the wider scheme of things. However, Kant's hope seems to be for the existence of God – a hope Murdoch would not endorse.

philosophical and liberal theologies. Instead, in Western Christianity at least, there is a return to more exclusivist, conservative understandings¹⁶⁶. Far from rejecting the supernatural and consoling elements of religion (those which Murdoch would regard as false), such elements are embraced, and revelation rather than experience is being hailed as the carrier of truth – a move which returns moral value to what is essentially divine command theory. Such evidence suggests that Murdoch's reading of the survival of religion is false.

The wide scope of Murdoch's thesis, and the fact that she does look to areas outside moral philosophy, provides elements which can be used in a myriad of areas which other realisms cannot. Murdoch's understanding of the spiritual element of morality accepts that religious belief can enrich moral striving, while maintaining that spirituality is not only the preserve of traditional religions but is part of human life, even for those who do not believe in a traditional sense. Such a framework, which regards religion as an aspect of all lives and which connects spirituality to a fundamental moral component, can be read as an assertion of the commonality of all humans. Murdoch herself only focuses upon the individual and does not stray into these wider applications. However, there is potential to use her realist understanding in such ways. Indeed, this path has been taken in part, and the realism of moral values assumed, in many instances of international communications, such as the Geneva Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹⁶⁷. However, in order for such an account to be effective, religious believers would have to view morality differently in that they would have to accept that morality, although intimately connected to religion, is not dependent upon any individual belief system.

¹⁶⁶ Manifested in the prominence of communitarian and post-liberal theologians such as Hauerwas, and similarly, in the rise of schools of thought such as 'radical orthodoxy', exemplified in the work of Milbank and Pickstock. These scholars wish to return moral value to a Christian framework and assert the importance of revealed truth. Hence, the assumption is that 'truth', including moral truth, is contained within one belief system, and the emphasis is upon persuading opponents to concur rather than to make their own independent, autonomous decisions.

¹⁶⁷ Both assume that all humans have certain innate rights, an assumption which has to be based on a universal, and hence realist, conception of moral values.

6.8. The Relationship of Religion to Moral Realism

Murdoch's attention to religion, though criticised as convoluting her philosophy, is essential to her thesis, for her aim is not only to establish a moral realism but to push back the barriers which segregate philosophy, religion and the aesthetic. She regards this divide into separate disciplines as misguided. In a very real sense this connection is also a return to Plato, in that in Plato's philosophy there is no divide between what would now be philosophy or theology; all are part of the same quest, the quest for knowledge. Thus, Murdoch does remain true to the Platonic heritage in that her search is for knowledge, for what is real. In doing so Murdoch presents a new, or at the least a revised, version of the relationship between morality and religion.

The absolute good is at the centre of her work, and the realism of moral value is her focus. In the apprehension of the good a religious element is needed. Thus, Murdoch intertwines the moral and the religious, making them part of the same quest to see reality and the good. While being critical of much institutional religion, she does endorse certain religious groups (such as mystics, both Christian and Buddhist). Religious attitudes which are open and seek of reality are an aid to, and in a sense complete, the moral quest. Such attitudes can be duplicated by those who lack traditional belief if the same quality of devotion and conviction is applied in attending to the good. Thus, if one follows a truthful, non-deluding religious path, then the reality of the Good is revealed; which in Christianity at least is not unexpected given that Platonism was a major influence on Christian thought. Alternatively, if one focuses on reality and upon the absolute good then a religious element will reveal itself.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the relationship of morality and religion. In so doing, various theories were pursued and different aspects of the debate explored. As the thesis progressed, conceptions of both moral value and religion were assessed; certain models were accepted and others rejected.

The first chapter examined the contemporary philosophical debate between realists and anti-realists which focuses upon the possibility of moral facts and of motivation. However, it was found that neither side of the debate adequately accounted for the human experience of moral values, and consequently the moral realism which was expounded was deemed to be unsatisfactory. This was for two main reasons: first, philosophy as a whole has moved towards a more scientific world-view that excludes factors which cannot be paralleled to those of the observable, scientifically-verifiable world; second, the debate is based upon two false dichotomies, one which artificially divides fact from value and the other which divides belief from desire. Thus, the very remit of moral philosophy and the limits within which moral realists are working makes the establishing of realism remote. Certain scholars, including McDowell, attempt to escape the limitations of the debate, but though he asserts that 'real' could apply to constructs other than scientific facts, he still remains trapped within a pseudo-scientific model. Likewise, the attempts to offer a realist formulation of motivation are further threatened by the realist wish to present moral values as 'mundane' and 'ordinary' reasons, and by the fact that they picture moral judgements and acts as distinct. The one thing which remains paramount in all the realist arguments is the phenomenology of moral experience, and in particular moral authority (the sense that moral values cannot be created from a person's wishes, but are objective). Thus, the first chapter clarified the issues involved on both sides of the debate but failed to establish a satisfactory moral realism. At the end of this chapter the question remained as to whether it was possible to offer an account of moral values as being objective, authoritative and known by human experience.

In order to address this question, Chapter Two explored the received models of the relationship between morality and religion. Traditionally, religion has supported realist conceptions and has provided an explanation of why moral values are authoritative. It was found that though theories of divine command have been the means by which moral realism has been upheld, the claim that values originate in the divine does not support, but undermines, moral values and their authority. Thus, it was concluded that moral values must be independent of religion if they are to be thought of as objective, and consequently the argument that morality is dependent upon religion was rejected. This said, other possibilities of the relationship between religion and moral value were discussed, in particular MacLagan's assertion that at its highest level moral value is religious, although religion is defined here very differently from the religion which was criticised by the humanists. This chapter, therefore, brought to light the necessary independence of morality and religion, while making the suggestion that there are other connections between moral value and religion. Thus, this chapter did not provide an explanation for the authority and reality of moral value, but encouraged the belief that moral value was self-supporting.

Having failed to find the source of the authority and realism of moral value in the religious sphere, in Chapter Three the possibility of art as the source of moral value was discussed. The hypothesis focused upon in this chapter was that art can provide a social and spiritual source for moral value; in particular, that the transcendence which individuals encounter in art offers an alternative spiritual experience for those without religious adherence. The transcendence found in the experience of art was traced to transcendental 'beauty', which is connected to the good and so to the moral sphere. Hence, in art one can have access to the real, the moral and the spiritual. However, such an explanation postulates the presence of the value of beauty which is no more certain than moral values, and therefore cannot ensure realism if these values cannot be established by other means. Furthermore, using art as a source for moral value is complicated by the claims, made by Fuller and Steiner, that art is essentially, at least for its spiritual and transcendent element, dependent upon religion. This suggestion simply returned the argument to the claims for dependency previously dismissed

in Chapter Two. Therefore, it was concluded that art cannot provide a source of moral value any more than religion can. Thus, Chapter Three established that for moral realism to be a possibility, moral value must be self-supporting, and moreover, if realism can be instituted, then the aesthetic and moral spheres can be proven to be connected.

Chapter Four introduced a new realist formulation in which values were deemed self-substantiating and yet connected to religion. This was done by introducing the work of Iris Murdoch. Murdoch hypothesises a moral realism in which values are absolute, and yet known in everyday experience. Her realism is based on a Platonic understanding of moral value in which moral values are real, objective and absolute by their nature, and their authority is not derived from any outside force. Furthermore, a holistic conception of human life was put forward which connects art and religion to morality. The moral life was thus held to be a way of life which brings fulfilment and even 'enlightenment'. Therefore, the moral life was deemed to be religious when religion is held to be a quest for reality. Hence, Chapter Four established a framework of moral realism in which values can be conceived of as real, without the reductionism which the confines of the philosophical debate in Chapter One necessitated.

Chapter Five analysed Plato's forms and the arguments contained therein were used to support Murdoch's realism. In particular, Plato's philosophy manifests the importance of realism if one is to have knowledge about any subject. Without the certainty and knowledge which realism provides, it was shown that human life and understanding are restricted, as values are essential to human knowledge. As a result, this chapter supported a realist position and highlighted the importance of moral realism for all areas of human life. Moreover, Plato's conception of the moral life, depicted in the ascent to the good in particular, reveals the importance of the religious element in the moral quest. Thus, it was found that the religious and the moral are part of the same quest for truth and reality and, in effect, are indistinguishable.

Chapter Six analysed Murdoch's Platonic realism. Plato's view of moral value helped to clarify and support Murdoch's thesis. In particular, Plato, though often using different terminology and concepts (for reasons outlined in the body of the chapter), offered support for her realist conception of moral value. This chapter also assessed the validity of the moral realism suggested by this thesis. It was noted that in order for such a thesis to stand, there are certain premises which must be accepted. In particular, one must first accept that what is 'real' is not limited to that which is empirically real, and second, one must reject the opposition of objective and subjective. Most importantly, it suggested that it is possible to conceive of religion and morality as related, by virtue of the fact that both are part of the quest for reality. Thus, the good reveals itself in the religious life and in the quest for goodness a religious quality is revealed.

This thesis has rejected many permutations of the relationship between morality and religion, judging them to be reductionist in some way or other. The relationship between morality and religion it endorsed was one in which moral value and religion are independent, but nevertheless fundamentally related. If they are conceived of in such a way that neither overwhelms the other, then they reveal each other at their highest expression. In other words, for one to live the fullest life and to see reality most clearly, the religious and the moral must both be accommodated. Furthermore, if this is not done and moral value and religion are not both part of the quest, one will not be able to clearly apprehend reality, for one's conception will be limited. Consequently, if the quest to see the real is truly embraced, and the good is sought as a religious object, then it is possible to endorse moral realism. Moral values are deemed to be self-substantiating and demanding of response (as many scholars from McDowell to MacLagan insist). They are known through experience, as stated by the realists of the first chapter, but whether the individual can see the good in any situation depends upon how closely reality is attended to. Furthermore, one must have 'faith' in the reality of the objective good, of which one is informed by one's experience, but which is only partially known.

Accepting this portrayal of both moral values and religion depends on accepting certain premises and rejecting others (many of which are often taken as read in academic circles). This thesis has brought to light various erroneous assumptions, notably: that there is a fact/value dichotomy, that there is a belief/desire dichotomy, that divine commands establish moral realism, that moral value must have an external source, that moral moments are compartmentalisable, that 'real' can be reduced to empirical existence, that subjective is the opposite of objective, and that transcendence is the opposite of immanence. Once these premises are rejected, the obstacles for adopting a moral realism of the kind outlined by this thesis are removed. The same criterion – that of ordinary experience – was used throughout in overturning these presumptions. These presumptions, though often assumed, were shown to be incorrect representations of the manner in which moral value occurs in human life.

Through the exploration of the relationship of morality and religion, moral realism was found to be not only possible, but the most viable way to explain moral experience. Hence, in some ways this thesis has returned to the realist claim of the first chapter, that realism must be true because it accords with moral experience. In essence, this thesis has endorsed such a claim, but only if other areas of life, especially the religious, are included, although the aesthetic also has its part to play. Therefore, if philosophy wishes to continue to describe the world accurately, rather than in the way which best fits its own schema, then it must return to these core elements and not continue towards a scientific model.

Ultimately, many will continue to dismiss moral realism for many reasons: because they do not feel that it accords with their own moral experience or because their beliefs about the world lead them to different conclusions.

This thesis, then, is twofold: first, it presents arguments for wider conceptions of both moral value and religion; and second, taking these conclusions together it develops an argument which makes it more difficult to dismiss realism as impossible, because it presents a plausible account of the nature of moral value as 'real' when combined with a non-dogmatic religious attitude.

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